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HUNDRETH ACRE

by JOHN CAMDEN





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THE HUNDREDTH ACRE





“HE LOOKED LIKE A MAN WHO HAD FALLEN ASLEEP.”

THE HAMILTON COUNTY

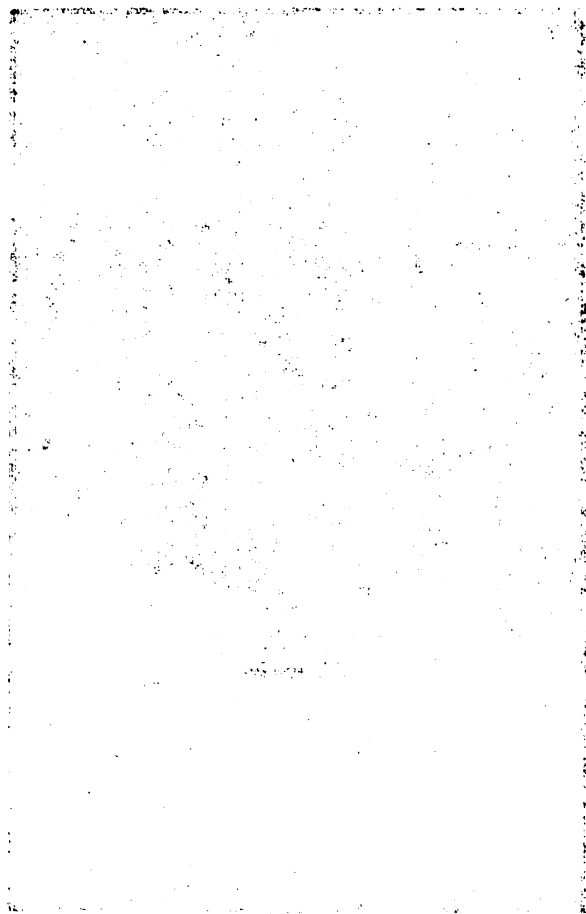
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The Hundredth Acre

By John Camden

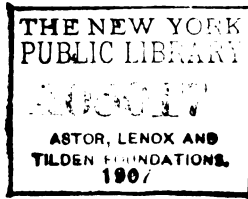


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THE HUNDREDTH ACRE

CHAPTER I

THE HOUSE ON THE RUE FONTAINE ST. GEORGES

It was a bitter night in February — the sixth of the month — and it began to sleet as I turned the corner of the church of Notre Dame de Lorette and looking north, along the street of that name, saw the lights of the Place St. Georges casting long, shimmering reflections on the wet pavements and blinking in the wind. Lights shone, too, here and there, behind close drawn blinds and in low doorways, but, for the most part, the streets were dark, cold and almost deserted. The few people afoot hurried homeward and only an occasional vehicle passed in that direction.

I was making my way in the teeth of the wind toward Dr. Lloyd's lodgings. I had not seen him for months, but no sooner had I arrived in Paris than I received a summons to come and sup with him. Lloyd was one of the richest and most eccentric

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men I knew. He could live like a prince anywhere and he chose to wander over the world and settle at last in an obscure corner of Paris, where he could pursue his researches in history, art and science and collect rare old books and curiosities. He had not married and at seventy-seven was without any close ties. He had two nieces, one of whom had married an Englishman, Lord Bentinck, in spite of Lloyd's opposition, and the other, a young girl, was living near Boston. There was also a nephew, Andrew Schenck, a worthless young scapegrace, who hoped to inherit his uncle's enormous fortune and was therefore spending his own on horses and drink. I had known Lloyd all my life and was junior counsel for him in his famous lawsuit with old Hez Portman. I thought it not unlikely therefore that his summons meant some new commission for me.

As I reached the corner of the rue Fontaine St. Georges I could see his lodgings across the way. He had the little house, four doors below the corner, with the overhanging turret and the iron grate at the entrance. The place had taken his fancy because it was an antique in modern Paris,

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a bit of architecture of the time of Francis First and full of fanciful associations. A street light placed directly opposite shone full on the low front of the house and showed the fluted pillars on either side of the door. The entire front was of softly colored gray stone and there was a turret on the corner toward the rue de St. Lazare and the narrow arrow-shaped windows showed light within. I knew that Lloyd's welcome was always warm to those whom he really called his friends and that he was sure to have a fine supper and some fine old wine, and the thought of good cheer on such a night hastened my steps. I crossed the street and rang the bell with such good will that I heard the shuffling steps of the concierge within before its reverberations ceased. The old man — a withered and bowed little Frenchman — opened the door and ushered me into a room which had served in the old days for the porter. Here he helped me off with my storm coat with a graciousness that was partly derived from his natural affability and partly from donations of francs and half francs on the occasions of my previous visits. The place was scantily furnished; a high-

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backed chair stood by the window where I had often seen old Cartouche nodding in the sunshine. There was a table with a lamp and a copy of the "Figaro" spread out under it. No one could leave the house by the front door without traversing this room, and the other door, into the hall, commanded an unobstructed view of the narrow stairs which ascended to the doctor's quarters above. As I went out into the hall I saw his tall lean figure outlined against the light at the head of this staircase.

"So you got my note in time, Brinton?" he said, "I particularly wanted to see you tonight for I heard you were on your way home."

"So I am," I replied, shaking hands as I reached the landing, "but I had no thought of going without seeking you."

"But not tonight," he said, leading the way to his study.

I laughed a little, experiencing a pleasant sensation of comfort and luxury at the sight of the familiar bookcases, the cheerful soft coal fire in the grate, the shaded lamp, the fur rugs, the easy chairs, the soft, heavy curtains. I had always thought

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Lloyd's rooms the perfection of comfort, in the strangest surroundings, for the house had scarcely a modern appliance and showed everywhere its relations to ancient times.

"It all looks the same," I remarked, "and it is delightful. When I am rich I want just such a room to tempt a poor devil to come through the sleet for the pleasure of being made envious."

"It's a bad night, I know," he admitted smiling, "but I wanted you."

"Why tonight?" I asked, sinking into a chair; "'the better the day, the better the deed,' is the saying, and if the deed is as bad as the night—" I shrugged my shoulders.

"True," he responded, pouring out a little glass of cordial and handing it to me, "yet an opportunity lost comes not again. We must plan for the day; who knows what the morrow will bring?"

"More money for you," I replied; "I see by the home papers that those mines of yours are turning out record breakers. Do you remember old Widow Haskins? Who used to say — 'them that has gets!'"

"It's true, in a way," he remarked,

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“ sometimes I tire of it; money makes money. I’m sick of it.”

“ Teach me the trick,” I said, “ I’ve had no chance to weary of it; I don’t think I should.”

“ Nor did I, at your age,” he replied, with a grim smile.

He was standing on the hearthrug looking down at the fire and the glow from it somewhat softened the harsh lines of his strong keen face. I can recall him today as he stood there and remember with great distinctness the quaint ungraceful lines of his spare figure, bowed a little at the shoulders like a man who had stooped over his books, his narrow gray head with the high arched forehead, his hooked nose and keen twinkling gray eyes — set well back under shaggy brows. He looked up and caught my gaze fixed upon him.

“ Well, Brinton?” he said, with a smile.

“ I was thinking that I never saw you look better,” I remarked; “ money getting is conducive to health and happiness; I always said so.”

“ On the contrary, it is a nuisance,” he retorted, with some bitterness; “ it makes you the victim of your relatives; they are

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always waiting for the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table, but they are not contented with the crumbs, they want the whole pudding."

"Naturally," I replied, laughing, "so should I. There is nothing harder than to accept crumbs. But I thought you had cast these things — relatives especially — behind you."

"Precisely, but relatives — like the poor — are always with you. It was of one that I wanted to speak to you," he added, "but we will eat first for I see that Marie has sent up the supper."

As he spoke an old Frenchwoman, in a neat black dress and white cap and apron, pushed aside the portière into his dining room and courtesied as she announced dinner. The table was spread for two in an octagon-shaped room which was completely lined with low bookcases containing some of his rarest volumes. The meal was a triumph of French cooking for old Marie was as famous as any *chef* in Paris, and in spite of "his lean and hungry air," Lloyd was something of an epicure. He seemed in unusually good spirits and talked a great deal, telling me of his historical researches

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and of his great luck in acquiring some rare old books and furniture at a sale of some great but impoverished family's household effects.

"There's a cabinet yonder," he said, pointing to his study, "that I want to show you, Brinton. It's a bit of sixteenth century Italian work in iron, and it's magnificent. You know these elaborate cabinets — *armoires artistiques* — were not introduced until about the time of the Renaissance and then they came from Germany, but the French and Italian workers were quick to imitate and some of the most beautiful examples that we have are Italian."

"You mean the famous cabinets with secret drawers," I said, "that always figure in romance?"

"Precisely," replied Lloyd, with his grim smile; "there are several secret drawers in this one. I paid something like two hundred dollars for it and I wouldn't part with it for twice that sum."

"I didn't know you cared so much for old furniture," I remarked.

"Sometimes I do," he replied, rising — for we had just finished dinner — "I will show it to you now," he added, leading the

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way back to his study after handing me one of his choicest cigars.

The cabinet, a really beautiful and quaint piece of furniture stood in the corner, immediately in front of a soft red curtain which draped the alcove beyond the window.

“It is damaskeened iron inlaid with gold and silver,” Lloyd said, touching it with the affectionate hand of the connoisseur, “and the bas-relief here is exceedingly beautiful. I am an admirer of the old iron work;” he added; “to me the perfection to which it was carried in the tenth and twelfth centuries is remarkable. Here, too, is one of your secret locks. Put your finger here, beside this head of St. Francis, and press that tiny silver bar — so!”

I had followed his instructions and a secret drawer sprang out of the side of the cabinet. In it lay a sealed packet. I laughed.

“Behold the document!” I said.

“I inadvertently opened the wrong drawer,” he replied, “but after all I intended to tell you of the whole matter. Don’t you recognize that packet?”

I looked at it more closely. “Assured-

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ly," I replied, "it's the will I drew for you a year ago."

"I put it there yesterday," he said; "it was in my safe on the rue Scribe, but I intended to change it."

"And you have changed your mind instead?"

He closed the drawer and sitting down, motioned me to a seat on the opposite side of the fire.

"I will tell you," he said, "for I want you to go to see my niece."

"Lady Serena?" I inquired, smiling; I knew how hotly he and Serena had quarrelled.

He shook his head. "No, Anice Holland. I haven't seen her since she was eleven. But since Serena has married an English lord, who wants my money, and Andrew has gone to the devil, I begin to think of Anice. She's been brought up by her father's sister, Mrs. Erckmann, and they have been writing me about her. They want her to come to Paris to study and I want some idea of her before I send her the means to come over here and torment me. Can you manage to see her?"

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I'll give you her address; she lives with her aunt."

"I can go — of course," I said, with a little hesitation; I did not care to report on the poor girl.

But he took me at my word and scribbled her address on a card which I put mechanically in my address book while he continued his conversation.

"You know at my death, after my scientific bequests, she is to have half my fortune and Serena the other half; I shall not leave Andrew Schenck one cent."

"I know," I replied, "but I rather expected you to relent."

"I did," he said; "I took that will out intending to destroy it but I have had letters from home and I shall let it stand. I shall put it back in the safe tomorrow."

I was not at loss to imagine the contents of his letters from home but I made no comment and after a moment he continued.

"Andrew has been behaving like the devil," he said grimly; "I shall send him a check to keep him out of jail but there's the end of it. Sometimes I can't believe the young scapegrace is my own kith and kin;

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he's a low, drinking, swearing, gambling ruffian and his last dido is beyond my forbearance."

As he spoke, Dr. Lloyd rose and opening an upper door in his cabinet drew out a slender bottle of golden wine and two quaint long-stemmed glasses.

"It's Chateau Yquem," he said, "and the finest; I want you to taste it, Brinton," and he filled the glasses and set the bottle beside him on the table. "No, I shall not forgive Schenck," he continued, in reply to a humorous suggestion of mine as I took up my glass; "I have never had any toleration for vulgarity, for pot-house dissipation. Andrew isn't as much of a gentleman as old Cartouche."

"Cartouche is unique," I replied, "and like your wine improves with age. After all, Lloyd, I can't help pitying the young rogue. You brought him up to luxury and adrift he'll go to the devil at a terrible rate. Can't you make some provision?"

Lloyd's strong, lean face darkened, the shaggy brows dropped over the small twinkling eyes, he struck the table with his clenched hand.

"No!" he thundered, "I'll support no

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rogues. I tell you, Brinton, I'm done with him, I'm done. He'll learn what it is to work for his bread and it will do him good. I'd rather give all to Serena and let the Englishman spend it."

"He may be a hard case, too," I suggested.

"Lord Bentinck is a pretty decent fellow, I've inquired," he replied, "and Serena was always my favorite. I'm thinking of running over to see her."

"You're a changed man, Dr. Lloyd," I said, rising; "the skies will fall."

"Have another glass," he suggested, "there's no hurry; it's early yet, not half past eleven."

I declined but he filled his own glass; then, as I insisted upon going, he left it untouched on the table and went with me to the head of the stairs.

"Don't forget Anice Holland," he said, and then added with a shrug, "my relatives are all sitting around waiting for me to die, I don't know why I should consider them."

"They'll wait some time," I retorted, "you look good for another sixty years."

"I'm getting on," he retorted, "but I'll

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confess that I feel unusually fit. Come in tomorrow to dinner."

"I can't, I'm engaged with Lavaur."

"Is that fellow still here?" asked Lloyd, with interest, "bring him around; he's a crank, of course, but he's got brain."

"I'd like him to hear you say that," I laughed back; "*au revoir*."

Lloyd waved his hand and retreated into his study. Old Cartouche helped me into my coat and opened the outer door. The storm had abated and the moon was struggling to look through scudding clouds.

"We shall have a fine day tomorrow, Cartouche," I remarked, as I passed out.

"*Eh bien, monsieur*, for those on whom the sun shines!" he said, with a shiver.

"To be sure," I replied, "but there is a consolation, it shines on the just and the unjust."

"Monsieur speaks truth," replied the concierge, closing the grate behind me and looking out, his wrinkled face illumined by the lantern across the street; "but I am old, and it rises not so often on the old—except out at Père la Chaise," and with this cheerful reflection he closed and bolted the door.

CHAPTER II

THE MUTE WITNESS

I was at breakfast in the café of my hotel when Lavour came in. He had been a chum of mine at Yale and was one of the best fellows in the world though, as Dr. Lloyd said, something of a crank. His father had been a French professor at Yale and his mother a rich New Haven girl. Gillette Lavour was a strange combination of French vivacity and American shrewdness and common sense. The possessor of inherited wealth, he had chosen no particular profession though he was a past master of chemistry and a really good physician, but his taste for painting had crossed his taste for more practical things and he spent much time in the Latin Quarter leading a Bohemian life. When I saw him enter the café, looking right and left for me, I recalled Lloyd's half contemptuous estimate of him with amusement. Lavour heartily disliked Lloyd while he acknowledged his brilliant qualities; the

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truth was that the two men were too much alike in their singularities to care for each other. At this point in my reflections, Lavour discovered me and signalled a greeting over the intervening tables, making his way to my place.

“Come and breakfast with me,” I suggested, as he took the chair opposite.

“Breakfast!” he replied, with a shrug, “I never breakfast. I had coffee in bed and I shall lunch at one. I roused myself at a beastly hour this morning to get over here and catch you. I want you to take the day off with me. Come over to my shop and meet some fellows from home; there are two here now from New Haven and three from New York. We can put in a day in the Quarter which will do you no end of good.”

I shook my head at this alluring picture.

“Can’t do it,” I replied, “I have two or three business matters here and I must see Lloyd again. By the way, Lavour, Dr. Lloyd wants you to come over with me to his house on the rue Fontaine St. Georges.”

Lavour grunted.

“That old crank?” he remarked, “that

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reminds me though;" he began to fumble in his pocket and pulled out a much read newspaper that had the familiar home headlines, "you know his nephew Andrew Schenck?"

"Very much so," I replied, smiling while I stirred my coffee, "what of him?"

Lavaur grinned sardonically and pushed the sheet toward me.

"That's the same Schenck you and I met in Rome three years ago," he said; "don't you remember how tipsy he was? How that old stick, his uncle, must adore him!"

As I expected, the paragraph gave me the key to Dr. Lloyd's anger. It appeared that Schenck had been secretly married to the daughter of Lloyd's former housekeeper and it had only come out because Schenck had deserted the girl and ceased to contribute to her support. The newspaper gave a long and glaring account of her suit for divorce which had been granted and alimony demanded. This was, of course, the matter which required the uncle's check to save the nephew from yet deeper embarrassments, and this was the very thing that would be most offensive

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to Lloyd, involving — as it did — a deliberate attempt to deceive him for the purpose of retaining a hold upon his money. Knowing both, I could not suppress a low whistle of surprise and dismay.

“ Well, he’s done it this time!” I remarked.

“ And lost a fortune, I suppose,” said Lavaur, with a chuckle, “ though Lloyd looked good for a hundred years when I saw him last. Poor Lady Bentinck will be old and fat before she sees a cent of that inheritance.”

“ I should like to have her hear you suggest age and flesh,” I said, with some malice.

“ Oh, I know Serena,” he replied, and laughed.

As he spoke an attendant stepped softly to my side.

“ A person wishes to speak to monsieur at once,” he murmured; “ he is in the lobby.”

Something in the man’s manner aroused my curiosity and having just finished my breakfast, I suggested to Lavaur that he should go with me to the office where we might arrange about a possible meeting

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before dinner. Lavour, who had the cigarette habit to an odious degree, pulled one out of his pocket and lighted it as we sauntered into the hall. There were only two or three people in the lobby and I saw at once a queer little bowed figure in black. It was old Cartouche, standing just inside the door, holding his hat in his hand and gazing about him with quite an apparent nervous agitation. Doubtless he brought some message from his master.

“It’s Lloyd’s man,” I said to my companion, “come to remind me to bring you to the house on the rue Fontaine St. Georges.”

“Excuse me, pray,” said Lavour, with a laugh and fell back while I went on alone to meet the old concierge.

“What is it, Cartouche?” I asked, carelessly, “the doctor is well, I hope?”

The old man stared at me strangely; his lips shook, he twisted his cap in his thin clawlike fingers.

“M’sieur is mistaken,” he said hoarsely, “M. le Docteur died last night.”

“Died?” I repeated, aghast, “you rave, man!”

“Pardon, m’sieur,” he murmured,

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apologetically, "it is true — he is dead."

I uttered a sharp exclamation of dismay and Lavaur, hearing it and seeing our faces, approached.

"Hear this, Gillette!" I cried in a low voice, suppressing my excitement, "Dr. Llloyd is dead — this man says he died last night. It is impossible! Why, Cartouche, I never saw him look better."

"*C'est vrai, m'sieur,*" he replied, looking down, "yet I found him dead in his chair — just where he had been sitting with m'sieur — and he was cold at six this morning — cold and stiff."

"Good heavens, I can't understand it!" I cried, looking at Lavaur.

But beyond a little surprise, he showed no emotion, placidly smoking his cigarette and gazing intently at Cartouche.

"Was it a stroke, or the heart?" he asked the concierge, mildly interested.

"*Mais, non, m'sieur,* I do not know," he replied, with a shrug, "the doctors do not say. M. le Maire is there and the gendarmes and two surgeons."

"Do they suspect foul play?" I asked anxiously.

Lavaur smiled. "It's the regular thing

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in the case of sudden death, Brinton," he explained, "it's like our coroner. I suspect the old gentleman's heart gave out."

Lavour spoke in English and Cartouche did not understand but stood looking earnestly at me.

"You will come, m'sieur?" he demanded.

"Of course, I'll come," I replied, and then to Lavour, "come, old chap, I'll be glad of a friend who knows Paris and Paris ways."

He hesitated a moment and then assented. Cartouche called a cab and Lavour and I got in, the concierge mounting the box beside the driver, and we were off at a brisk pace. My companion leaned back in the corner, smoking with half closed eyes and in apparent indifference, but I could not imitate his unconcern. My own mind was busy with the problem of this sudden death. Lloyd's tall, stoop-shouldered figure, his lean, shrewd face, his twinkling eyes, rose before me to repudiate death. Then I remembered the incident of the secret drawer and reflected that I should have to get that will out and see that it was probated at the proper time.

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The singular chance that had turned Lloyd's intentions at the last moment, his speech with me on the subject on the very night — as it had proved — of his death, recurred to me with such force that I told the whole circumstance to Lavour and asked him the usual course in Paris.

“ The *juge de paix* will affix his seals to all the papers and effects — unless you regard yourself as an heir,” replied Lavour, with a grin.

“ Heaven forbid!” I exclaimed devoutly; “ there is enough of a complication already.”

“ Precisely so,” he said, “ therefore you will hand the will to the *juge de paix* who will, in turn, deliver it to the president of the tribunal who, in his turn, deposits it with a notary public. Having executed this simple process with the usual amount of red tape, they will keep you cooling your heels until they are entirely satisfied that all the French laws in regard to wills of aliens — and they are rigid — have been complied with, and all the fees paid. My dear Brinton, I'm really sorry for you,” and he laughed; “ ah, here we are,” he

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added, as the carriage slowed up on the rue Fontaine St. Georges.

As he spoke, old Cartouche climbed down to open the door and I saw a gendarme on the steps of the house. We had no sooner alighted than we found ourselves in difficulty, for the police at first refused to admit us. However, this was arranged by Lavaur who happened to know the *maire* of this arrondissement and vouched for me as Lloyd's lawyer.

When we entered we found another gendarme in Cartouche's chair by the window eating some of the old concierge's roasted chestnuts. *M. le Maire* and Lavaur walked up stairs ahead of me, so I was the last to approach the room which I had left so pleasantly the night before. The familiar look of the stairs and hall gave me a shock; it seemed impossible that death had been there before me. When I entered the study Lavaur and the *Maire* were standing a little apart talking to a third person who proved to be one of the physicians who had been examining the body. The room was precisely as I had left it with the exception of the heavy cur-

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tain which had been pushed aside to admit the pale gray light of a Paris morning. The cabinet stood in its place by the alcove, the old Flemish clock ticked in its corner, the chairs were pushed easily here and there, as we had left them, the bottle of Chateau Yquem, half empty, stood on the table with the two glasses — mine just where I put it and the other near the hand of the dead man. They had not yet moved him and he sat there, leaning a little on the table, his head resting on the tall back of his chair, one nerveless white hand hanging at his side, one almost clasping the glass. He looked like a man who had fallen asleep; the lean gray face was almost unchanged, the posture was easy, there was no distortion. The fire was dead in the grate; a cold draught from the half open window stirred the gray hair on Lloyd's forehead. In all else, the scene was so little changed that I felt as if he might speak to me at any moment. I stood looking at him, lost in painful thought; I suddenly felt that I had been fond of him, that I had suffered a bereavement.

Lavaur came to the table and bent over the glass which stood at the dead man's

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hand. It was then that I recalled the fact that he had filled it as I rose to go and had evidently returned to drink the wine for there were only a few drops in the bottom of the glass. Lavour took it up and holding it against the light looked at it closely.

"This is a curious glass," he said absently, "a very curious glass."

"Yes," I assented, "it is one that Lloyd bought in a curiosity shop on the Quai Voltaire."

Then I remembered the packet in the secret drawer and turned to the *Maire*, a courteous, gray, little Frenchman with pointed moustaches. I explained briefly the statement that Lloyd had made to me on the previous evening and, with the official's consent, I opened the secret drawer and found the will sealed and secure. Making sure that it was the document, I handed it to him and was told that the seals were to be affixed to all the dead man's effects before the body was removed for a post-mortem examination.

Meanwhile, Lavour and the physician were bending over Lloyd examining him with a new and intent interest, and I saw that my friend had a magnifying glass in

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his hand as well as the wine-glass. But my attention was diverted by the arrival of the *juge de paix* and another surgeon who was to assist at the post-mortem. The little room was becoming crowded and the tragedy oppressed me; I turned away to the window.

Then Lavour touched my arm.

“ My dear fellow,” he said, in a low voice, “ there is poison in the wine-glass.”

CHAPTER III

LADY SERENA

I found it difficult to believe Lavour's statement that there was poison in Lloyd's wine-glass. I scouted the idea.

"My dear Gillette," I said, "you dream. I drank that same wine myself and I never felt better in my life."

"Precisely," he replied; "that is one reason for the suicide theory. There is undoubtedly poison in his glass, there could have been none in yours. We shall presently analyze what remains in the bottle and see if the drug is there, or only in Lloyd's glass. There is no doubt about it, Jack, I discovered the drug at once, and M. Verney, the physician, agrees with me. You need not look so skeptical. The post-mortem will convince you, however. Besides, I have found some grains of the powder spilled upon the table; you can see it yourself—the trail of the serpent, we might say."

It was hard for me to be convinced, but

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I saw that Lavaur was thoroughly in earnest and I knew his cleverness as a chemist; he had pre-eminently the gift for such researches. It put a new and terrible face on the whole affair and one that was wholly confusing, but there was one thing that I could not believe.

“He never committed suicide,” I declared; “I knew the man — it wasn’t in him to do it. And if it wasn’t suicide —”

Lavaur laid his hand heavily on my shoulder.

“*Tonnerre!*” he said, “we will call it suicide — do you not see?”

“Yes, I see that poor old Marie and Cartouche will be suspected,” I replied, “of course, I see, Gilette. Therefore this discovery of yours strikes me as being portentous. I do not attempt to dispute your conclusions; you say it is poison — that the drug is in the glass; I accept the statement, but who — in heaven’s name — put it there?”

“The simplest and the safest theory is that he put it there himself,” retorted Lavaur dryly.

I looked up and our eyes met squarely.

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“ I do not believe that for a moment,” I said firmly.

He shrugged his shoulders.

“ Neither do I,” he replied, “ for more than one reason — but it’s an ugly matter and there must be a theory in this case and that seems the most harmless — ”

“ Nonsense!” I interrupted, with indignation; “ Lloyd was one of the sanest men I knew, with no more reason to kill himself than I have. He looks as if he had fallen peacefully asleep. These French officials must be idiots to fancy such a thing.”

“ They are frequently,” he assented genially, but all the while his steady eye maintained its gravity; “ all the same, I think, Brinton, we will call it suicide.”

“ We will call it no such thing!” I retorted testily; “ what do you mean, Gillette?”

He laughed a little bitterly. “ My dear fellow,” he began, but we were interrupted by the *Maire*, M. Radot.

He had gone below stairs a few moments before and now returned.

“ Monsieur,” he said, addressing me, “ there is a lady at the door who desires

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admittance, declaring that she is M. le Docteur's niece. She is also in great distress and excitement over this sad event. Do you know her?"

And he handed me a card which I read in some astonishment.

"Lavaur," I exclaimed, "it is Lady Bentinck!"

Something akin to a smile flashed into Lavaur's eyes but he made a wry face.

"It's a bad time for women and hysteria," he commented grimly; "however, you will be the one to see her — you know her best."

"Oh, yes, I shall be very glad to see her," I retorted, and assured M. Radot that it was all right, that Lady Bentinck was really next of kin.

M. le Maire had evidently been impressed — I could easily imagine in what manner — and was willing to allow Lady Serena the utmost latitude which the formalities of the situation permitted. It ended in my going down-stairs to the concierge's room to explain to her the painful state of affairs. The gendarme retiring to the vestibule left the room free for her reception.

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I had not seen her ladyship since her marriage and the prospect of meeting her would have enlivened a dormouse. I must confess to well nigh forgetting the grim gray figure up-stairs in the study when I opened the concierge's door and saw Lady Serena. She was standing by the window with all her frills and furbelows gathered up in both hands as though she expected to accumulate all the cigar ashes and chestnut shucks that the gendarmes had scattered on Cartouche's erstwhile spotless floor.

She had changed in a way; she was more of a *grande dame* and less of a coquette, but she was still altogether lovely, a creature of pink and white, with an abundance of golden hair and delightful dimples, and she never looked more charming than now under a great hat, covered with soft gray plumes, and with some kind of a filmy, bewildering boa around her neck. When I entered she held out both hands in the kindest greeting but with a face full of distress.

"You here!" she cried, "tell me what it all means, John. Can my uncle be dead? I can't believe it!"

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“Neither can I,” I retorted gravely, “yet it is true,” and I told her as simply as I could the details of his sudden death, without disclosing Lavour’s painful theory — or indeed the discovery of the poison. “Dr. Lloyd was talking of you only last night; he was thinking of going over to England to see you,” I concluded, “and today — well, it is all over, Lady Serena.”

She sat down weakly in Cartouche’s chair and looked at me with that wide innocent look that she always had at command. She was plainly bewildered, however. Perhaps she had thought so much of the possible inheritance that this sudden realization stunned her.

“Do you know I think it is all just like Uncle Henry?” she cried.

It was my turn to be amazed.

“One would think that he was in the habit of dying suddenly,” I remarked dryly.

“Oh, of course I don’t mean that!” she declared, “but you know he always did the unexpected — he always disappointed you in some way. If I had only seen him yesterday!”

“Yes, if you could only have come to

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Paris one day sooner," I assented; " I think he really wanted to see you."

" But I did — I was here, here at this very door, and he would not see me!" she cried.

" You were here — yesterday?" I was a little bewildered; why had Lloyd spoken so frankly of her, and of his will in her favor, after refusing to see her? " My dear Lady Serena," I said, " whom did you see here? Old Cartouche?"

" The concierge — that old man? No, it was a woman," replied Serena, nervously unfastening her boa and slipping it down on her shoulders; " and — and, well she was pointed in her refusal."

" I cannot imagine old Marie, the cook, being anything but affable," I said, " nor do I believe that Lloyd authorized a refusal. I shall ask her myself."

" Oh, never mind!" cried Serena hysterically, pressing a lace bordered handkerchief to her eyes; " I've no doubt he told her to shut me out. You know he never forgave Bentinck for marrying me — wasn't it ridiculous? As if we could help it? But oh, I'm so sorry, I'm really so sorry, John. He used to be so kind to

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me as a little girl, and he really was such a cranky old dear. What ought I to do? Bentinck isn't with me; you'll have to advise me."

"I don't think you can do anything just now except go back to your hotel and wait," I replied, "unless you want to see him —"

"Oh, I don't!" cried Serena, with a little scream of dismay; "I don't — I'd never get over it, you know I'm a coward, John!"

"Frankly, I didn't know that," I retorted, almost amused at her evident terror and the way she rose, gathering up all her furbelows in her hands and yet seeming to overflow with ribbons and feathers and little strings of beads; "where are you staying?" I added.

"Oh, at Meurice's, of course," she replied, "and I've no one with me but my maid. I really came over on purpose to see Uncle Henry; I wanted to see him about — about —" she hesitated and blushed and was apparently relieved by the entrance of Marie.

The old woman came to tell me that Lavaur desired to speak to me. She was

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beating a hasty retreat, after dropping her courtesy to Lady Serena, when it occurred to me to question her.

“Lady Bentinck, why not ask Marie now about your uncle’s refusal to see you?” I said, turning to recall the domestic.

But Serena would not permit it.

“Oh, never mind,” she said, with a shrug, “it was probably not her fault and what difference does it make now?”

It was evident that she had not caught Lavaur’s name and I excused myself a moment to answer his summons.

I made up my mind meanwhile to question Marie later myself about her denial of Lloyd’s niece.

I found Lavaur on the stairs alone. His face wore a singularly reserved expression and he asked nothing about Serena.

“Brinton,” he said abruptly, “get Lady Bentinck away and I’ll report to you later. This discovery of poison in that glass is going to make no end of trouble and formality and I shouldn’t let her know of it yet.”

“I have not told her,” I assured him, “she is alone in Paris; she was here yesterday to see her uncle —”

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“ I know it, the old cook has already told the *Maire* and the commissaire de police,” replied Lavaur grimly.

“ Confound the old fool!” I muttered, “ how absurdly premature.”

Lavaur shrugged his shoulders.

“ As it turns out, my dear Brinton,” he retorted, with his cynical smile, “ Lady Serena was not the only female visitor yesterday.”

“ The plot thickens,” I remarked dryly.

“ Precisely, but you know what to expect of the French police,” he replied, “ though I suppose you have never been arrested in Paris?”

“ Heaven forbid!” I muttered devoutly.

“ It’s not so bad as all that,” he said, suppressing a laugh, “ experience is a great teacher. Go and take Serena away, my dear fellow. Where is she staying?”

I told him and he laughed.

“ Of course it had to be a swell place to suit her. I suppose Uncle Henry was to pay the bills. See here, Brinton, I’ll meet you there at two o’clock. Can you wait for me?”

“ I must,” I replied regretfully; “ there is nothing for me to do here.”

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“Nothing,” he replied decidedly; “it’s a matter now for the doctors and the police.”

I accepted his assurance and conducted Lady Serena to her carriage, but no sooner were we on our way to the hotel than I fell to wondering why Lavaur, who had been so reluctant to go to the rue Fontaine St. Georges, should be now so willing to stay there and to send me away. However, I was allowed no time for reflections as my companion kept up the conversation.

“Do you believe in presentiments?” she asked me; “I think I do — oh, yes, really. You see I was suddenly determined to see Uncle Henry. I had no reason to know that I should be welcome, but I felt that I must come. Bentinck laughed at me, but I had my way.”

“You always did, Serena,” I commented dryly.

She gave me a sidelong look and smiled a little, as if she was uncertain whether I meant it as a compliment or not.

“Why, of course, what is the use of living without it? By the way, John, are you married? I haven’t heard.”

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“ That casualty hasn’t happened yet,” I replied.

“ I believe I’m glad,” she said laughing, and then she pulled a long face. “ I am very heartless to laugh when poor Uncle Henry is just dead, doubtless you think I’m a wretch. I am so sorry — really so sorry; I always hoped it would be patched up, that uncle would like my husband. Of course you know he was vexed because he thought Bentinck wanted only the *dot*. Dear me,” added Serena, with a shrug, “ why shouldn’t he want a *dot*? Poverty is hateful, and when one has big estates — I can’t quite imagine Tom marrying the proverbial milkmaid, but then I don’t feel as Uncle Lloyd did. One must have things — I’m sure that Bentinck has never been as mercenary as my cousin Andrew and uncle adored him —”

“ I’m not sure that he adored him,” I remarked; “ he was devoted to Andrew’s mother; she was the favorite sister.”

“ Oh, I know,” rejoined Serena, nodding at me, “ and Jack — do you suppose he’s left everything to Andrew?”

I looked at her with a grim smile.

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“What do you mean?” she said, uneasily, playing with her lorgnette.

“I’m a lawyer, Serena,” I said.

She made a wry face. “I hate lawyers,” she declared; “Bentinck has one and he always comes down when things are in bad shape and then we have to live in Dorsetshire and give up society and — literally eat bread and cheese. I hate that man, I do really.”

“You speak with so much feeling that I cannot help suspecting that you have had a recent visit from him,” I remarked, as we neared the hotel.

She blushed scarlet and bit her lip.

It was no longer difficult for me to divine the presentiment that had brought her to Paris. The carriage was stopping at the door of the hotel when she suddenly laid her hand on my arm, pointing with the other out of the window opposite.

“Good gracious!” she said, “to think that I should remember him and that he should be here — here when uncle is just dead.”

“Who?” I asked quickly, my thoughts flashing to Andrew Schenck, but I was mistaken.

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“It’s old Hez Portman,” she said with a queer little laugh, “don’t you know? Uncle Henry’s bitter enemy; they’ve had a land feud for twenty years and they almost came to shooting before uncle left home. I believe that old man will be positively glad, he’s such an old ogre. Don’t you see him?”

I made out a stubby figure in a brown suit, with a tall silk hat which did not set naturally on a bullet head, and I had no difficulty in recognizing the man. A deadly feud had raged between Lloyd and Portman over the boundary line between their two places outside of Boston; a feud out of all proportion with the importance of the disputed line.

“Did you know that your uncle lost the suit in the Circuit Court,” I said, “and he was going to appeal it to the Supreme Court?”

“Dear me, no,” said Serena, with a shrug, “how furious Uncle Henry must have been to lose it. Were you his lawyer?”

I nodded, smiling a little as I thought of the acrimony with which the battle had been waged, and watching Portman’s

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stubby figure until it disappeared in the crowd.

The carriage had stopped and I was helping Serena out when she looked up and saw her maid approaching.

“ Oh, there’s Shane and I’ll have some tea later if you can come up-stairs to my parlor, John, and take the time to drink it.”

I knew that I had to meet Lavaur in an hour and that I might not see her alone again.

“ Lady Serena,” I said gently, “ I wouldn’t mention my reasons for coming to Paris — not now.”

She looked up at me in wide eyed amazement for a moment and then she blushed furiously.

“ I wish you would tell me what it all means,” she said, petulantly. “ Truly I cared for Uncle Lloyd, one would think —” and she burst into tears and dropping her veil over her face, hurried past me into the hotel.

CHAPTER IV

THE WOMAN IN THE CASE

It was nearer three than two when Lavaur came in. I had been waiting for him with great impatience and hailed him the moment he entered the lobby. At his suggestion we retired to a secluded corner of the smoking room, where we could be alone, and he ordered cigarettes and wine before he would say a word about the case.

“Have the police finished their examination of the premises?” I asked finally, my endurance quite exhausted by the languid ease with which he rolled a cigarette.

The servant who had brought the wine had effaced himself, and we sat alone in an alcove behind the palms.

“The police have made a thorough search of the premises, and have cross-examined the servants,” he replied, in his leisurely manner, “and M. Verney and I have completed an examination of the wine. There was absolutely no poison in the bottle and none showed in your empty glass,

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but his contained a considerable quantity and the trail of the powder on the table — which led me to the discovery — is quite unmistakable; there were also a few grains spilled on the hearthrug.”

“ At his feet?” I asked.

“ No, on the opposite side of the table. Did he put anything in his glass when he poured out the wine?”

“ Not a thing,” I replied positively; “ I was observing him at the time and he filled both glasses at once and asked me to taste the wine. I took one at haphazard; therefore, if he had put poison in one of the glasses I might have taken it.”

“ Precisely,” he said thoughtfully, “ and if we were living in the middle ages we might suppose that he had intended to poison you and took the wrong cup himself by mistake. However, as that is not feasible, we must suppose that there was either poison in the wine-glass when he took it from the cabinet, or that he put poison in it after bidding you adieu. The first theory is improbable, for he could scarcely have poured the wine into the glass without observing the powder in the bottom of it.

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On the other hand, neither you nor I think he committed suicide."

"No," I said firmly, "I am sure he did not. His opinions on that point were well known; he had even written an article on the subject, I believe for some magazine at home. He regarded it as a peculiarly cowardly act."

"Opinions often change and men become cowards when they are forced to face an extremity," he retorted tritely.

"We do not, however, know of any such extremity in his case," I said bluntly.

"No, we do not," Lavour replied, puffing away at his cigarette; "but you know these French police — or rather you don't know them — they are looking for a theory — in short, for a woman."

I laughed a little grimly.

"Lloyd will disappoint them," I said, "he wasn't at all that sort."

Lavour looked at me from under his half-closed eyelids and began to laugh softly.

"Do you know that there has been a woman there recently and one who has pleaded with him about money matters?" he said. "So much we know — thanks to Cartouche's excellent hearing; it continues

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good — even on the other side of the key-hole.”

“Hang Cartouche’s hearing!” I said emphatically, “Lloyd was rich and, of course, had pensioners. It is unlikely that this woman — if she exists anywhere but in Cartouche’s imagination — or any other woman — drove him to suicide. Does the concierge attempt to describe her?”

“He does, and it is very melodramatic,” replied Lavaur smiling, “she was tall and wore a black face veil and a black jacket, her skirts seem to vary from brown to blue as Cartouche happens to feel — and at present he feels blue.”

“Bosh!” I ejaculated, “it is a romance of his — nothing more. Some poor creature who wanted some of Lloyd’s money — a great many people wanted a pinch of it.”

“Very likely,” he said, with a shrug, “but we get back to the suicide theory. It remains to explain the poison, it was there. Now, of course, we can begin by suspecting the servants —” he waved his hands in a liberal fashion — “but ——”

“I do not suspect them,” I replied deliberately, curiously oppressed by the whole thing, “but — unless this goes for suicide

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— they will be suspected, of course, and probably arrested.”

“ They are practically under arrest now,” he replied placidly, pouring out some wine; “ have a glass — no? You’re afraid of poison, Jack! ”

“ You’ve got a theory, Lavaur,” I said, with impatience, “ what is it? Out with it? ”

“ Yes, I have a theory,” he replied lightly, “ but it is very theoretical. In the first place, we seem to have nothing to thrust a peg in. That whole day is minutely accounted for. Dr. Lloyd was in the house the greater part of it. The police dragged the whole net while I sat and smoked with *M. le Maire*. By the way, Brinton, you should smoke more, it’s a talent. It makes a man a good listener and an impersonal witness.”

“ Pshaw! ” I retorted, “ you’ll get a cigarette heart as well as your information.”

He shrugged his shoulders; he knew his incessant cigarette smoking was an ugly habit and he found a dozen excuses for it.

“ Go on and tell me what the police have got hold of,” I added, with impatience.

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“ Very little, as usual. Old Marie never left the house until she went home at night; she sleeps in a garret on the rue de Chaume — an appropriate place, too, by the way, for a cook — and as she had been to early mass — what we call the biddy’s mass at home — she had no call to go out after breakfast. When Cartouche is absent she answers the bell, but she only answered it once that day and that was when she refused a veiled lady admittance —”

“ Lady Serena,” I said promptly.

“ Exactly. It was during a fifteen minutes absence of Cartouche’s; he went to the chemist’s for some medicine. Happily for him he could produce the bottle and the chemist bears out his statement. Now we come to Dr. Lloyd’s part of it. He was out from ten in the morning until a quarter of one, and he was out for twenty or thirty minutes in the afternoon — at the time when Lady Bentinck called.”

“ Ah,” I said, “ then he did not know of her visit.”

“ No,” replied Lavaur, “ and it appears that the mysterious female of the black jacket and veil had called before ten and had seen him for about fifteen minutes.

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After she left — Cartouche showed her out — Dr. Lloyd gave a sweeping order to refuse her admittance at all times and seasons. The simple fact is that Marie mistook Lady Serena for the tabooed visitor — with whom she was not very familiar — and, as it turned out, she never even gave Serena's card to Dr. Lloyd at all."

"That was unfortunate, he really wanted to see her, I feel sure," I said, and then added musingly, "it's a closed case, Lavour, I don't see any trail, do you?"

"There are one or two theories possible," he replied, tossing aside his third cigarette, "and one is that there was a third person concealed in the room when you and Lloyd were there, a third person who managed to poison the wine and effect an escape."

"I cannot imagine it," I retorted, frowning on such a suggestion, "the place is small and Cartouche was below stairs all the while."

"Then we must fall back on the servants."

"Never in the world!" I replied, with warmth; "old Marie is a simple person

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and Cartouche was really devoted to Lloyd.”

Lavaur nodded, half closing his eyes as he leaned back in his chair.

“ You refuse that,” he said, “ you scout the idea of suicide. Very well, then we suppose it was murder. Some one must have been in the room and put the powder in the wine while Lloyd was bidding you goodbye. *Bien*, that is possible but not probable. It is possible and one thing bears it out. There is a grain or two of the powder behind the Italian cabinet at the left hand corner, there are several grains on that side of the table. The person who put it in the glass was either hurried or nervous — or both — and made a bungle of it. We — you and I — know that Lloyd was not nervous. Moreover, why did he not sit down and put the powder in on the side of the table where his chair stood? He would not have done such a thing in haste.”

“ Is it possible that he mistook it for a medicine? ” I interposed.

“ Possible, yes, but he was not a believer in drugs according to my recollection of him. The servants say that he was not

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known to take any. Besides, a man of his mind would scarcely keep a deadly poison so carelessly as to make a mistake. He was obviously methodical; he labelled and pigeon-holed everything. But, supposing that the murderer was concealed in the room, how did he, or she, get out? Cartouche sleeps in a closet at the foot of the stairs, and he swears that every door and window were bolted when he arose this morning, just as they were on the previous night. His imbecility in sticking to this — when he must see the drift of suspicion — convinces me that he is not evil minded; he would have planned better.”

“How soon did he discover Lloyd’s death?” I asked, after a moment’s reflection.

“Just after letting Marie in, about seven o’clock. He went up to set the table for breakfast — Lloyd kept his New England habits — and Cartouche found then that he had never been in bed. He says that he thought he had had a stroke and he called Marie to help him. Then finding that he was really dead, he ran out and got a gendarme almost at the door. This man mounted guard while Cartouche ran for Dr.

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Verney, whom he knew. Now, my dear Brinton, where was our prisoner; how did he, or she, get out?"

I shook my head. "I confess, Gilette, that — unless we can find some clew — the suicide theory is the strongest."

He smiled and thrusting his hand into his pocket he pulled out a small bit of woollen stuff and handed it to me. I looked at it in some bewilderment. It was apparently a fragment of brown serge, hemmed on one side and shot through with a darker brown thread; it had been jagged out of a larger piece.

"Well?" I said, looking up at his imperturbable face.

"It's a piece of a woman's flounce," he said, "and I found it behind the Italian cabinet, caught on a rear corner of it. Marie swears that she never possessed such a skirt, nor do I believe she ever did."

"The mysterious female again," I remarked, "but it doesn't materially help us."

He poured out another glass of wine. He had a very hard head.

"I wish Lady Bentinck had stayed in England," he remarked abruptly.

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I saw his point.

“Do you think it possible ——” I began.

He threw out his hands with an impatient gesture.

“Anything is possible in a case like this, and Marie has confused her with this unknown woman. Can't you get her away, Brinton?”

“I suppose I could,” I assented, “but the will must be seen to and I am necessary.”

Lavaur frowned.

“Lloyd is to be buried tomorrow,” he said; “you can read this confounded will and get her away by night.”

“If she'll go,” I said, with a grim smile, “Serena is a very uncertain quantity.”

He shrugged his shoulders and sat staring moodily at his wine-glass.

“Aren't you going to see her?” I asked.

He frowned and then smiled.

“No,” he said, “a man need not be a fool twice.”

Then I knew that he had really loved Serena Lloyd as I had suspected.

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Almost as he spoke one of the servants approached me.

“Monsieur,” he said, “a lady wishes to see you; she is in the lobby.”

“A lady?” I was a bit surprised; this could not be a summons from Lady Serena and no one else knew that I was in Paris.

“What sort of a lady?” I asked.

“A tall lady, m’sieur,” he replied, discreetly looking down, “wearing a black dress and a black veil.”

I glanced at Lavaur and saw a flash in his eyes.

“The mysterious female,” I said, in English; “I’ll go out and see her.”

“*À la bonne heure!*” said Lavaur, with a grimace, “I’m not in it though.”

“Wait for me,” I retorted hastily, and rising from my seat I followed the servant with a good deal of curiosity.

Was it possible that it was the unknown?

CHAPTER V

THE EX-HOUSEKEEPER

As soon as I entered the lobby I saw a tall, thin woman dressed in black and wearing a black face veil. She was standing in a remote corner quite alone, and I was at first convinced that she was unknown to me. However, in that I was mistaken, for as I approached she raised her veil and called me by name.

“You don’t seem to know me, Mr. Brinton,” she said, “though you’ve seen me often before. I was Dr. Lloyd’s housekeeper for ten years in Boston, and before that I was Mrs. Schenck’s nurse.”

Looking at her steadily, I began to remember her drab-colored expressionless face and her small colorless eyes. She was Andrew Schenck’s nurse and foster-mother, his own mother having died when he was three weeks old. I recollected it all now but I could not recall her name. However, she told it at once.

“I am Leah Buyse,” she said quietly,

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“ and I came to Paris two months ago as nurse to Mrs. McHenry’s children. I have just read all about Dr. Lloyd’s death in the evening papers and about your being here, sir, and I came straight around to this hotel to see Lady Serena Bentinck. Then they told me you were here and I wanted to see you.”

“ Have you seen Lady Serena? ” I asked, suspecting at once that this was Lloyd’s mysterious female visitor, and that all the romance about it was knocked to pieces.

“ No, sir, ” she replied, folding her hands before her and looking down, “ she wouldn’t see me; may be she has forgotten me altogether, though I knew her very well and used to look after her when she was with Dr. Lloyd. But then she’s married an English lord. I only wanted to know about Dr. Lloyd. It’s very hard to believe he’s dead; I saw him only yesterday and he was most kind — he always was that. I can’t understand his killing himself, sir, it isn’t like him. What ailed him? ”

I knew by what she said that the public

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had not yet got hold of the discovery of the poison.

“ That is the mystery, Mrs. Buyse,” I said, quietly; “ by the way, you say you saw him yesterday. Can you tell me at what time? ”

“ About half past nine in the morning, sir, he had just finished breakfast. We had quite a talk.”

“ About money matters? ” I asked abruptly, eyeing her keenly. I suspected her of being Schenck’s agent.

She looked up in surprise and I thought that there was a change in her face.

“ Ye-es,” she admitted, with some reluctance, “ I wanted some help for Mattie,— Mattie’s my daughter,” she explained; “ she’s married but her husband was crippled in an accident in the mill last year and he can’t work any more. There are six children. Indeed, sir, they do need help and Dr. Lloyd gave me a check for her. I’ve got it, I hadn’t even had time to send it;” she fumbled in her hand-bag and produced a slip of paper; “ there it is, sir.”

I glanced at it mechanically and saw that it was Lloyd’s check for one hundred dollars made out to Matilda Mack.

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“ The doctor was most kind,” she said, with a conventional whimper, “ and I can’t bear to think he’s gone. Wasn’t it more like a stroke? ”

“ There was poison in his glass,” I replied simply.

The woman stared at me with dilated eyes.

“ You don’t mean it, sir? ” she said. “ It was just kind of hinted that he’d made way with himself, but I didn’t begin to believe it! To think of his poisoning himself! ”

I did not think it worth while to go into the murder theory just then so I returned the check.

“ You can’t draw that now, Mrs. Buyse,” I remarked.

Her face fell and she crumpled it tightly in her hand.

“ Poor Mattie! ” she said, “ it’s too hard — it is indeed. ”

I remembered Lloyd’s orders not to admit her and suspected that the woman was a regular beggar and was trying to work on my feelings. Yet I could not help feeling sorry for her evident distress, though I saw it was less for Lloyd’s death than for his money.

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“ You had been to see him before? ” I asked carelessly.

“ Yes, sir, twice, ” she answered readily, drying her tears; “ once when Mrs. McHenry first came here with me, in the spring, and once when I came back from Italy — and this time. That is all. ”

“ You are still with Mrs. McHenry? ”

“ No, ” she answered, reluctantly, I thought, “ no, sir, I was taken sick in Rome and she sent me here two weeks ago to wait for her. I’m staying with a decent woman, who was a maid to Mrs. McHenry; she lives on the rue de la Chaussée d’Antin. ”

I wanted much to know if Mrs. McHenry still paid her wages or if she had depended upon bleeding Lloyd, but I did not feel justified in catechizing her further. Moreover, if her story was true, there must have been another female visitor on the rue Fontaine St. Georges. I could not quite divine her object in wishing to see Serena unless it was to solicit financial aid. In a moment, however, she struck another note.

“ Do you know anything of Mr. Andrew, sir? ” she asked anxiously; “ is he here? He’ll feel his uncle’s death mightily. ”

“ I think very likely he will, ” I re-

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marked dryly, thinking of the provisions of the will. "I don't know where he is. A cable was sent to his New York address, however. It was a surprise to most of us to hear of his marriage and divorce."

"Poor Mr. Andrew!" she sighed, pressing her handkerchief to her eyes; "the doctor was very angry. It was he who told me. I hope, sir, he hasn't cut him off in the will?"

"That question will be finally answered tomorrow," I replied sharply; the woman's eagerness for her favorite, though natural enough, offended me. It was not poor Dr. Lloyd that these people mourned but his purse.

She stood a moment longer, awkwardly silent and uneasy, and I was on the point of closing the interview when she spoke again.

"You'll think it strange, sir," she said, hesitating, "but can I find out to-morrow? You see, it's this way; Mr. Andrew has always been like my own boy to me and you know how it was — the doctor was so angry that I'm afraid for him. It'll go hard with him if he hasn't any money; he's been brought up to use so much and he's

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been so open handed that he has lost most of that his mother left him. I can't help feeling bad, I can't indeed."

The woman's attachment to her foster son was so obviously sincere that I forgave her.

"The will is to be read tomorrow at about one o'clock, I suppose," I said, "right after the funeral anyway, and then you can learn its contents from any one, Lady Serena's maid or old Cartouche. I can tell you myself, for that matter," I added, with some reluctance to be annoyed by her.

She thanked me effusively and bade me good morning. Then dropping her veil over her face, she made her way out and left me again at liberty.

Relieved to have a tiresome matter over, I went in search of Lavaur to find that he had finished his bottle and was walking to and fro in his corner of the now almost deserted smoking-room. There was only one other occupant, an old Frenchman, who was asleep over his newspaper.

It gave me a little grim pleasure to shatter the police theory of the mysterious female visitor.

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“The woman of the black veil has materialized,” I said, “and she is only old Mrs. Buyse, Andrew Schenck’s foster-mother, and, for awhile, Lloyd’s house-keeper. Nothing could be more prosaic; she had been there to beg for some money for an unfortunate daughter. It’s the old story. Rich people always maintain a train of beggars.”

Lavaur laughed grimly, continuing his promenade.

“Lloyd looked like that kind,” he said, sarcastically, “very much so! However, that clew has vanished. It will set the police on another. I have half a mind—” he stopped, and stood looking at me thoughtfully.

“Well?” I said, interrogatively.

“Yes, I’ll do it,” he exclaimed, “I’ll take Lloyd’s house for a month or two.”

I shrugged my shoulders. “My dear Gilette,” I remonstrated, “how unpleasant.”

“Why?” he asked, “it’s an old rookery and I’ll trail the serpent from there. I tell you what it is, Jack, I believe it’s murder, and I want to find out. But if the

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police get the idea that it's suicide, let them, it's safer."

I assented to that, thinking of old Cartouche and Marie, of whose innocence I felt assured.

Lavaur took out his watch and looked at it.

"It lacks only three hours of my dinner time," he said, "and you're engaged — oh, I know — but I've asked five or six men and we can't disappoint them, besides, you were not related to—"

He was interrupted by a servant with a message from Lady Bentinck. She had heard who was there, and would we both come up stairs to take tea with her?

Lavaur hesitated and was lost.

"Come," I said authoritatively, "you must see her tomorrow. Besides, she is well worth seeing."

"Do I not know?" he replied, with a shrug, but he followed me to the elevator.

Lady Serena was waiting for us in her private parlor and she wore a bewildering tea-gown of pale blue silk covered with lace. A little tea table was set at her elbow. She seemed to have forgotten her emotion at the door of the hotel and she

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greeted us both very simply, with unaffected cordiality.

“ I think it is really cruel of you to leave me here so long in suspense,” she said; “ I am really very lonely and frightened and I am sorry now that I came.”

“ Don't expect us to agree with that,” replied Lavaur, with his easy gallantry; “ I haven't seen you for six years, Lady Bentinck. It's almost worth a murder.”

Serena gave a little cry, setting the tea-cups rattling as she half rose.

“ What do you mean?” she cried, “ you can't mean that? ”

He seemed repentant.

“ My dear Lady Serena,” he said, helping himself to a buttered muffin, “ don't let us be heroic. It was a figure of speech. Yes, of course, the doctor's death is unexplained.”

Serena looked at him a moment round eyed, but she had a thoroughly practical mind.

“ Do you know I haven't a black rag with me? ” she said, in an awed voice, “ and I've sent my woman out to buy a costume for to-morrow. Of course, it won't fit! ”

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“ How disillusioning you are! I thought your things unfolded and bloomed — like the petals of a rose,” remarked Lavaur frivolously; “ I had no idea that you bought clothes just like ordinary, commonplace women.”

“ Dear me! ” retorted Serena laughing, “ if you could see the bills! ”

Then she busied herself making the tea. I thought Lavaur made her a little self-conscious; she was flushed and not quite at ease.

“ Isn't it too bad that I didn't come sooner? ” she went on, handing me a cup; “ John tells me that my uncle was ready to forgive me. I really can't imagine it, but then I suppose I ought to believe John.”

“ Should you? ” said Lavaur dryly; “ he belongs to a profession of liars.”

Serena shrugged her shoulders, “ I shouldn't like to say just what I think of Bentinck's family solicitor,” she said, “ and I shall spare John's feelings by not saying anything too honest about his profession; ” and she looked at me archly, and then added: “ You know my cousin, Andrew Schenck, has been getting a divorce

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before we knew that he was married? ”

“ You mean his wife has,” I corrected her.

“ Oh, it’s the same thing in its results,” she said, carelessly; “ imagine Uncle Henry facing a *mésalliance* and a divorce in the family.”

“ What do you mean by a *mésalliance*? ” drawled Lavour, consuming more muffin.

Lady Serena darted a scornful glance at me.

“ Well, the French explain it that when a man marries a woman whom he has never met socially — in the same houses, you know — he is making a *mésalliance*,” she said, and then she positively giggled as she added; “ but Andy married his housekeeper’s daughter and he must have met her — in the pantry, at least.”

“ Then it is a *mésalliance* to marry a lady whom you meet in your pantry,” said Lavour. “ Good heavens, I remember an amiable old gentleman in New Haven who married his cook.”

“ Do you recollect whether he ever got a divorce? ” I asked.

“ Never — he died of gout.”

“ She must have been a divine cook,”

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said Serena, looking across her tea service at us, her white hands clasped under her chin. "Really, I think we'll have to marry our cooks soon to keep them. But, truly, I'm sorry about Andrew, he is always bringing the family into the papers. He was in England two years ago betting on horse races. He tried to get Bentinck into it with him on some pet horse, but I stopped that. I knew what that would mean if Uncle Lloyd found it out. He would have declared that my husband led Andy on!"

I laughed. "Andrew Schenck is so tractable," I remarked. "By the way, Lady Serena, do you know Anice Holland?" I added.

She shook her head. "No, I never saw her but once or twice," she replied, "I'm always shy of my relations, too. I'm afraid she's rather a funk."

I was called to the door at this moment by a messenger from the *Maire*, M. Radot, to tell the hour set for the funeral of Dr. Lloyd. The formality of my signature and the reading of the note kept me for a few moments. When I returned I was surprised to see Lavour standing, with a

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grave face, looking down at Serena who lay back in her chair quite white and frightened. I could not divine what had passed between them, but as I drew near she turned to me with almost an appeal.

“ John,” she said, “ John, I want to go home. Will you take me? ”

“ Certainly,” I replied, still perplexed; “ after the funeral and after the will is read. I have charge of the will, Lady Serena.”

When I said this, she gave a little exclamation and looked at Lavour as if for suggestions. He nodded, staring into his tea-cup.

“ That will do,” he said, “ there’s a three ten for Calais.”

“ Upon my word,” I said, a little nettled, “ it appears that you are anxious to be rid of me.”

He looked at Serena and laughed, but she rose and held out her hand with a tearful smile and Lavour and I took our leave.

CHAPTER VI

THE WILL

Dr. Lloyd was buried in the morning with a simple ceremony at Pere la Chaise, and it seemed to me that the most sincere mourners at the grave were old Cartouche and Marie, the cook. Lady Serena, dressed in faultless black, leaned rather heavily on my arm, but I do not remember that she shed a single tear. On the contrary, she drew a sigh of relief when we turned from the grave. In fact, she had been extremely nervous all through the ordeal, and we were none of us quite at ease for the situation was singularly complicated and unfortunate. The post mortem examination had proved, beyond a doubt, that Lloyd had died from the effects of the poison taken in his wine. The verdict had been suicide, but both Cartouche and Marie were under police surveillance. My own strong conviction of their innocence made me determined to fight their battle for them if the matter should be pressed to

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extremity. But the suicide theory seemed so strong to any one unacquainted with Lloyd's peculiarities that I became more and more convinced that it would be accepted by the authorities unless some more evidence was produced to prove that the poison could not have been self-administered. Looking over the case, point by point, I saw that — were the question once raised — the difficulties of proving the innocence of the servants would be enormous, and, in spite of my reluctance to attach suicide to Lloyd's memory, I began to hope that the suspicion of murder would not be strengthened. These thoughts occupied my mind and made me, I fear, a depressing companion for Lady Serena and Lavaur on the drive back from the cemetery. However, I suspected that her thoughts were full of the will, which was to be formally opened in the presence of the notary in whose charge it had been since the morning after Lloyd's death. As for Lavaur, he seemed deeply preoccupied and did not even attempt to help me out.

An American lawyer at present in Paris, was to represent Andrew Schenck and

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Anice Holland. They had cabled power of attorney to him and he had been notified to meet us that morning.

We drove at once, therefore, to the office of the notary and there Lavaur was about to leave us, when Lady Serena begged him to remain. I saw that she was much agitated and seemed to rely more upon him than upon me, which was rather annoying as I was Lloyd's attorney and her own legal representative.

We were ushered at once into the stuffy little office on the old rue de l'Arbre Sec, where M. Doudet, the notary, awaited us. With him was Mr. Jackson Gibbs, the attorney for the other heirs. He was a little man with a shrewd little face and a distinct inclination to toady when he found himself in the presence of a titled personage, a representative of the English aristocracy, although a rival of his clients.

The formalities of the occasion having been complied with M. Doudet produced the will, the same that I had taken from the secret drawer on the rue Fontaine St. Georges, and having called upon me to recognize the document, he broke the seals

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and handed it to me to read aloud to Lady Serena and Mr. Gibbs.

I remembered the provisions of the will very well and began to read the familiar preamble stating the health and sanity of the testator, in a perfunctory manner. I knew that the will would be in the nature of a pleasant surprise to my fair auditor, for she and her cousin, Anice, were the chief beneficiaries. There were, of course, as in the case of nearly every large estate, several legacies to charitable and scientific institutions in Lloyd's native state, and also small amounts to old and faithful servants at home. These points were all familiar and I was only a little surprised as I proceeded down the typewritten page that my memory was evidently faulty, for nearly all these small bequests were less than I had thought except the five thousand to Mrs. Leah Buyse, which remained the same. But when I turned the page, reading mechanically, I came upon such an astonishing deviation that I stopped short and stared blankly at the words.

There was a hush in the little room and I was conscious of the rustle of Lady Bentinck's skirts as she stirred in her chair,

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and of the ticking of the clock on the mantel.

“ Will monsieur proceed? ” suggested M. Doudet softly, rubbing his hands.

I looked up and met Lavaur's eyes which were fixed on my face with a singular expression in them. Even little Mr. Gibbs began to fidget and to look toward Lady Serena.

Then I began to read and read firmly on to the end though my head whirled.

There was a long and careful enumeration of Lloyd's property, in Boston, Lynn and in New York, beside his mines and railroad stocks and Standard Oil interests, and then it was divided between three heirs in a singular manner. The munificent sum of twenty thousand was bequeathed to his niece, Anice Holland, and the same amount to his niece, Serena Lloyd Bentinck, and the remainder of the large estate went in bulk to his nephew, Andrew Schenck!

I laid down the paper on the notary's desk and stood resting my hand upon it and trying to clear my mind of all erroneous recollections. Both Lady Serena and Lavaur mistook my silence for acquiescence. They knew that I had had

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previous knowledge of the will and they supposed that I was fully prepared. She rose and lowered her veil.

“ I think I shall go back at once to the hotel,” she said stiffly, and then her natural frankness overcame her manners. “ I think it’s a shame,” she said to me hotly, “ Andy gets everything and Anice and I only get a pittance from that great fortune, and we all know how little Andy deserved uncle’s infatuated partiality. I — I can’t see, John Brinton, how you had the face to draw that will! ”

“ But I did not draw it, Lady Serena,” I replied quietly.

She opened her blue eyes angrily and treated me to a haughty look.

“ I thought you inferred that you did,” she retorted, trying — rather unsuccessfully — to control her vexation. She was very near tears, but not for Lloyd. In fact, I think, she never mourned him less than at that moment.

“ I drew one will — certainly,” I replied, “ but not this one.”

“ What did he do with the other then? ” she cried impetuously; “ destroyed it, I

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suppose. Who witnessed this, and what is the date? ”

“ That is the mystery, ” I answered, looking at the document; “ the date and the witnesses are precisely the same, only I am not named as executor; Schenck is. ”

Serena made a little exclamation.

“ You must be mistaken about the date and the witnesses, ” Lavour said quickly.

Mr. Gibbs, too, came over to examine the paper and I saw that he was uneasy and evidently undecided as yet what to do or to say.

I took a note-book from my pocket and turning back quickly to the date, December 6th, 1901, I showed them my entry of the will and the names of the witnesses. Lavour took up and compared the document with my notes and there were the date and the names precisely as I had them.

“ Are you the only person acquainted with the contents of the will that you assert that you drew? ” asked Gibbs severely.

“ With the will that I drew, ” I corrected him dryly; “ yes, as far as I know. The witnesses probably knew nothing. I am the only person who can prove the dif-

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ference, but I have a draft of the will among my papers at home."

Mr. Gibbs made no immediate reply, but pursed up his lips. M. Doudet, on the other hand, looked completely puzzled, but I noticed that Lavaur's face was alive with interest. Lady Serena bent down and examined the will curiously.

"Were the differences very essential?" she asked coldly; she could not quite recover from her disappointment.

"Essential? — I should say so," I replied, looking more closely at the paper. "Conditions were exactly reversed."

She made some little exclamation of surprise and began to nervously fasten and unfasten her gloves.

"That is an extraordinary statement, sir," remarked Mr. Gibbs sternly.

"I am aware of it," I replied coolly, "but it is nevertheless true."

Lavaur glanced at me, his keen, long face singularly alert, while M. Doudet looked from one to the other in evident perplexity. Lady Bentinck shook out the lace ruffles about her neck and picked up her muff.

"I shall contest that will," she announced unguardedly; "I don't believe

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that Uncle Lloyd ever meant it! If he made two at once he must have been out of his mind anyway."

Mr. Gibbs was more cautious, although I think, in his vulgar little soul, he longed to agree with the aristocracy.

"It favors one of my clients certainly," he remarked, "but the other, Miss Holland, suffers under it."

There seemed nothing, at the moment, for the rest of us to say. Lavaur had finished his examination of the paper and offered Lady Serena his arm. M. Doudet remained in charge of the document for the time. As Lady Serena and Lavaur left he asked me a direct question.

"Monsieur, do you think that there is something irregular about this will?"

"Frankly, M. Doudet, I cannot reconcile myself to it," I replied; "it is not the document I drew, yet it bears the date and the names of the witnesses. It remains to be seen what course will be pursued by the heirs."

Mr. Gibbs, meanwhile, stood silent. He was so obviously unfamiliar with the case that I did not expect any pearls of wisdom

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from his lips. Besides, his position was a peculiarly delicate one.

“ May I ask how you came to be retained by both Miss Holland and Mr. Schenck? ” I inquired, as I looked about for my overcoat and hat.

“ I have known Miss Holland’s aunt for years,” he replied, “ and have lately corresponded with her. Mr. Schenck sent me a dispatch from Southampton.”

“ From where? ” I said sharply.

“ From Southampton,” he retorted; “ Miss Holland’s aunt knows him well; she probably cabled to him as soon as she received her dispatch.”

I could not suppress a soft whistle of surprise. So, these two parties to the will might be reckoned as a combined force, unless the small legacy to Anice Holland caused a rupture.

“ I think there will be a contest, Mr. Gibbs,” I said briefly.

He bowed gravely, eyeing me with evident disdain — I was not an English lord. Leaving him to talk to M. Doudet I hastened my departure.

At the door I found a woman dressed in

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present look and as I approached she raised her veil. It was Mrs. Bryse.

"How does it fare with Mr. Andrew, sir?" she asked eagerly.

"Excellently well," I retorted dryly, "he gets the lion's share."

She drew her breath sharply, staring at me out of her large, colorless eyes.

"I can't help being thankful," she said meekly. "though I do hope the young ladies are well remembered."

"You are, Mrs. Bryse," I replied, and passed on, annoyed in spite of myself, at the woman's eagerness.

I did not tell her that her favorite was in England. It occurred to me that she must have followed us in some way to M. Doudet's office. These leeches were too eager for the spoils. But, as I proceeded, I speedily forgot her in my thoughts of other matters. To me the change in the will was more significant than Lloyd's death. The conviction of foul play was growing upon me. But how could a murder be committed thus? How was the will changed? I found myself confronted by a mystery that had no solution.

When I arrived at Meurice's, Lady

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Serena and Lavaur were hot in discussion over a cup of chocolate in the café. She was in a penitent mood.

“ I was horrid to you, John Brinton,” she said, holding out a plump white hand that was much bejewelled, “ but I wasn’t myself. Of course, Uncle John was the most prejudiced creature in the world, but I really call that will more unkind than he ever was! What do you say to it? ”

“ My dear Lady Serena,” I replied, taking the vacant chair at the table, “ I really do not know what to say. The night before your uncle’s death he referred to the will that I drew in December, 1901, and said that he intended to allow it to stand. He explained that he had relented toward Andrew but that his divorce suit ended everything — or, to be more exact, ‘ his recent conduct ’ — he did not refer to the divorce in so many words. He added that he should not make any provision for him. Under the will that I drew he received not one cent.”

“ What in the world does it all mean? ” she cried. “ I can’t understand it. Has some one stolen the true will? ”

I did not reply. Both Lavaur and I sat

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looking at each other thoughtfully. Serena leaned back in her chair.

“ Good heavens! ” she said plaintively, “ I wish men had tongues; these non-committal creatures drive me to distraction. For my part, I believe that will is a forgery, and as for that hateful little sycophant, Gibbs or Bibbs, I’m sure he looks like a conspirator. Where’s Andy Schenck? ”

“ Poor Gibbs, how vain our efforts to be ingratiating! ” I remarked reflectively.

Lady Serena pouted. “ I asked you about Schenck, ” she said.

“ To be sure, ” I replied, “ he is at Southampton — or nearer. ”

She gave a little cry of surprise and then began to laugh.

“ Did he run away from the lady — or the tiger? ” she asked.

“ From both, I suspect, ” replied Lavaur, and then excusing himself for a moment he went off toward the lobby. At the moment, I attached no importance to his movements.

“ Really, Lady Serena, I do not believe in that will, ” I said, taking full thought of

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the consequences of my announcement; "and I am ready to help you dispute it."

She did not immediately reply; she sat, instead, toying with her cup of chocolate, the color rising in her cheeks. As last she looked up and I saw how troubled her eyes were.

"I am sure it is all hateful," she said, "and it does seem quite unjust. If Andrew had been a dutiful adopted son we could endure it more easily, but as it is——"

"I am puzzled; that Miss Holland and he have the same attorney seems rather odd," I remarked.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"My dear friend," she said carelessly, "I have heard that Andrew means to marry her—after the divorce scandal has blown over."

"Then she can't be counted upon to dispute the will," I said, at once.

"Not if she expects to marry the fortune," laughed Lady Serena; "but, good gracious, Andy may elope with the money and leave her forlorn."

As she spoke, I saw Lavour standing in the door behind her and signalling to me.

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I excused myself for a moment and went out to meet him, leaving Serena gazing rather blankly at the vacant chairs. He drew me outside of the door.

“Brinton, I want you to get her away,” he said, in a low voice, “and at once. They have become suspicious, found some new evidence; Marie and Cartouche are both arrested and Marie insists that Lady Serena got into the house on her first visit. There will be trouble.”

I looked back at Serena’s figure at the table, at the determined pose of her small head.

“And if she will not go?” I suggested.

“Then she will be arrested,” said Lavaur.

CHAPTER VII

ON THE BOAT

It was a stormy night when Lady Serena and I embarked at Calais. She had been very silent all the way from Paris, but I attributed this partly to the presence of her maid in the same compartment carriage, and partly to her depression over the turn of affairs. But once on the deck of the ship with me her tongue was loosened. It was so wet and squally that nearly all the passengers went below, but Serena, who was an excellent sailor, appeared in a long storm coat with capes and an altogether captivating cap on her head.

“Come, John,” she said imperatively, “let us walk up here. That cabin is full of sick people and too stuffy for endurance. Look how the last little lights on the French shore are blinking through the fog; it’s perfectly dismal, isn’t it?”

“It’s certainly a wretched night for the trip,” I replied, “but nothing depresses you long, Serena.”

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She shrugged her shoulders and turned away from the rail, walking swiftly along the shining wet decks at my side.

“ I don't know why I'm not depressed,” she said lightly, “ for I'm in a regular hole. I know, of course, that Bentinck thought I would bring him a fortune, and what is this petty legacy but a drop in the bucket? It's nothing at all when people are in debt up to their ears, and we are! ”

I experienced a curiously unpleasant feeling that Bentinck must be a scamp to bank on a girl's possible inheritance, but I could not say so, and she went on.

“ I can't understand it,” she said, nodding her head, “ and I only hope it will get cleared up. Uncle Lloyd certainly was a crank, but this is carrying it rather far. And he brought me up to expect money, too. Good gracious, yes, I was to have a fortune, and how I love money, too. It sounds simply disgraceful, but I just love to be rich.”

“ To be sure,” I replied, with a chuckle, “ you love to spend money, you always did.”

“ For what else should I want it? ” she asked disdainfully, “ surely not to hoard

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it, that isn't in me. It's only meant to make people happy. Oh, it's all horrid, Jack, horrid!"

"I quite agree with you," I said, "but it will be no easy task to set things straight, I fear."

"Set it straight?" she repeated, a little bewildered, and then: "Why, John, I didn't mean only the will—but poor Uncle Lloyd's death—to think that he poisoned himself is dreadful."

"I don't believe he did, Lady Serena," I said deliberately.

"Then, of course, it must have been one of those horrid old servants."

"Neither do I think that," I replied quietly.

"Goodness, do you think it was me?" she said flippantly, laying her hand on my arm and suddenly stopping me under a light.

"Good heavens, no, Serena," I said sharply.

She began to laugh softly and turning again, walked on, her hand still resting lightly on my arm. The wind blew the rain in our faces and we both lowered our

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heads to escape it. The end of the deck was deserted.

“ You think you are taking me away from the French police, John, don't you? ” she asked.

Then she had divined our motive after all and that accounted for her acquiescence in the hurried departure.

“ It was best to be out of Paris, ” I said, non-committal.

She stopped again and leaned on the rail with both hands, looking back across the black waters. Her figure was as youthful as a girl of sixteen. Presently she turned her head, looking at me over her shoulder.

“ John, ” she said, “ I've always heard that lawyers mismanaged their own cases, but I never dreamed that you were so slow. Don't you see, John, didn't you see? ”

A ray of light from one of the ship's lanterns fell on her pretty, piquante face making it a silhouette against the night. I began to share Lloyd's disgust that she had married a fortune-hunting peer.

“ I suppose I'm dull, ” I said slowly, “ but I don't catch your drift, Serena. ”

She whipped her hands off the rail and faced about, the wind tossing her fair hair.

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“ I shall tell you,” she said, “ can’t you see the plain inference? If that wine was poisoned — if it was poisoned — John, who was with Dr. Lloyd when it was poured out into the glass? Who saw him last? ”

“ Do you mean to say that you believe that, Serena? ” I demanded fiercely.

She came over swiftly and laid both hands on my arm.

“ Should I be here, John? ” she asked lightly.

A great many things became suddenly clear.

“ Good heavens, you and Lavour put this up between you to get me away! ” I exclaimed, and felt the blood running hot to my face.

She nodded. “ We simply didn’t dare to tell you,” she said, in a propitiating voice.

“ I suppose that Lavour suspected me,” I exclaimed bitterly.

“ No — no, I’m sure he did not,” she cried eagerly, “ but the whole situation — it is so mysterious, so ugly —— ”

“ Yes,” I acknowledged stiffly, “ it does look black, now I see it as others do, but

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you must pardon my stupidity in not viewing myself as a murderer.”

“ Now you are angry,” she remarked, as if the charge were not sufficiently ugly to madden a man, “ and there is simply no use in losing your temper. It’s a nightmare anyway! ”

I turned from her in anger and walked to and fro in the little space between the rails. I had been a fool, but this was worse than I thought. I felt betrayed by my friends, but I saw the full significance of it at last. I wondered a little if old Cartouche had entered a charge against me; I remembered the furtive watchfulness of the old man’s eyes at the funeral.

Presently Serena’s voice sounded — far away and reproachful.

“ I’m awfully sorry, John,” she said plaintively, “ but Gilette Lavaur told me that I would simply have to run away with you; that otherwise you would not budge. So, I’m eloping to meet Bentinck.”

“ Lavaur has not treated me fairly,” I retorted choking with anger; “ he has made a fool of me, he and you together! Do you think I like running like a criminal? I shall return by the next boat.”

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“Goodness!” she said, “you must have a confiding mind. Before I’d throw myself into the arms of French justice after the Dreyfus case! Besides, what use is it, John? You can’t prove anything—I defy you to — and there is the poison.”

I turned on her hotly. “I should like to ask, madam, if you think I put it there?”

“I think I should — were I the Prefect of Police,” she replied, with extreme composure.

“Thank you, Lady Bentinck,” I replied, sternly sarcastic.

“You know very well that I don’t believe it, John,” she said easily, “we might as well shake hands.”

But I ignored her overtures. The shock of being considered a murder suspect was too much for my equanimity.

“I shall return and face the affair,” I said bitterly, “although, of course, this will look like flight.”

“You are a great goose,” she replied; “what good will you do? You have no one’s word but your own and no one knows you there or your standing at home. There’s only one hope, John Brinton, and

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that is to solve the mystery, and Lavaur is going to try to do it."

"I am greatly beholden to Lavaur," I said uncharitably.

"Well, I think we all ought to be," she remarked, trying to steady herself by the rail, for the ship was rolling now in a deep trough of the sea. "Do you know really I think you're unkind not to even offer me your arm on this slippery spot."

"I should think you would be shy of my help," I replied ungraciously.

"You are quite shameful!" she said hotly. "Haven't I shown my faith? I oughtn't to have told you, but I couldn't help it—I couldn't hold my tongue, I never can. Bentinck says so."

This was so like the old Serena that I laughed—a little bitterly though—and gave her my arm. She took it, comfortably reassured. No one believed in Lady Serena more than Lady Serena.

"You know really, John, I have a horror of circumstantial evidence," she remarked confidentially. "I am sure that lots and lots of poor creatures have been hung on false charges, and it must be so exceedingly unpleasant to be hung any way,

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that it seems as if we ought to be sure about it and hang the right man. As for French courts, too, I may be very unjust and English, but I fear I don't believe in them — not very much. The Dreyfus business shook my faith. I thought I was doing a great thing to keep you out of the whole affair, if I could, and see what thanks I get! ”

“ My dear Lady Serena, ” I replied, “ you do not see things from a man's point of view. ”

“ No, thank heaven, I don't! ” she exclaimed comfortably, “ a woman's is so much easier always. I suppose it's a point of honor with you to go back and get arrested, so as to prove that you ought never to have been suspected. Good gracious, how stupid and awkward that is, when all you have to do is to keep away altogether until they settle who did it. Nothing in the world could be more simple. ”

“ Nor more cowardly, ” I remarked sharply.

She shrugged her shoulders. “ Caution is the better part of valor, ” she remarked tritely; “ Lavaur and I talked it over — you remember that time we were at tea in

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the hotel? Exactly — that was it; he had just told me when you came in from the hall. I was quite overcome at first.”

“ At having entertained a suspect? ” I asked dryly.

“ You are very unkind,” she said gravely, “ you know that I believe in you.”

“ Pardon me,” I replied quickly, “ I can’t quite get over it. Of course, I am grateful for your belief in my innocence; that should go without saying.”

“ Oh, nonsense,” she cried, “ don’t be sarcastic, — there is no question about it. I wish that Uncle Lloyd had been more like other men, then nothing of this kind would have happened; he would have been visiting me in England and safe and sound. The idea of living in horrid old poky lodgings in a Paris back street — with a perfectly horrid old concierge and a parrot-faced cook! It is enough to give one the creeps to look at that house.”

“ On the contrary, I think it is interesting,” I said, “ and I thoroughly enjoyed my evening there with him, and he never seemed in better spirits. There seems to have been something strange in his sudden

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change of mind in regard to his will though, on the very eve of his death.”

“ It’s weird, isn’t it? ” she agreed, and then she sighed; “ dear me, what will Bentinck say? There is so much wanting about the estates and I so wanted to do the right thing and bring a nice *dot*. To think that I went journeying all the way to Paris to talk to my uncle about it and he immediately got himself murdered! It is positively gruesome! Oh, don’t let us talk about it! ” she cried and turned away.

We began to walk again, the wind in our faces.

“ My hair’s all torn up, ” she remarked cheerfully irrelevant; “ I should retire for repairs if I could get them, but Shane’s on her back; she always is — all the way over, poor wretch. ”

But in spite of her flippancy, she could not restore our previous cheerfulness. My mind was busy with the ugly problem. I could not imagine why I had not seen the full significance of the affair. To lie under the suspicion of murder was sufficiently hideous to excuse my silence, but Lady Serena was not minded to let me escape her.

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As we approached Dover she asked me what I intended to do?

“Go back by the next boat,” I replied firmly.

“And what is to become of me?” she asked pointedly; “you brought me over and Bentinck doesn’t expect me; I doubt if he is in London. I expect you to escort me down to Dorsetshire.”

“Good heavens, Lady Serena,” I protested, with more impatience than gallantry, “don’t be unreasonable. Can’t you see that a man mustn’t run away from such a charge?”

“But it isn’t a charge yet,” she said cheerfully, “and I’m your charge at present. You’ve got to take care of me, John; I’m a helpless female and I appeal to your chivalry.”

“If I take you down there it will not keep me from going back,” I said doggedly.

“Oh, very well,” she assented sweetly, “if you are possessed with a desire to run into the arms of a spike moustached gendarme — go! But at least, take me home.”

I was never nearer to anger at Lady Serena than at that moment. Her indifference to my feelings and her obstinacy

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moved me to sore displeasure, but, in a way, I was responsible for her until she was safely lodged in London and I disembarked therefore in no very good humor.

Shane was following us with the bags and bundles and I was piloting Lady Serena to a cab when she suddenly wheeled around, and giving me a light push into the shadow, avoided a lamp on the dock.

“What is it?” I demanded, rather brusquely.

“Sh!” she whispered, and then began to laugh softly, “it isn’t a gendarme,” she explained, “but my cousin, Andy Schenck. There he goes — he is going over tonight. I didn’t want to see him — I couldn’t shake hands with him — not tonight!”

CHAPTER VIII

THE WOMAN WITH THE RED HAT

Lord Bentinck met us at Charing Cross, which convinced me that Serena had telegraphed him in spite of her protests to the contrary. She was as full of little wiles as ever, it seemed, and as determined to gain her ends.

I had only seen Bentinck once or twice at the time of his marriage, and had viewed him then with more or less prejudiced eyes as a titled Englishman in pursuit of an American fortune. I confess to being agreeably surprised when I saw him meet his wife at the station. He had become the typical, broad-shouldered, florid faced Briton, rather heavy in build and expression, but he had an honest pleasant eye and a frank smile which did not entirely disappear even at Lady Serena's peculiar greeting.

"Oh, Tommy," she said, "we're ruined."

"I dare say," he replied, with a laugh,

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“ your uncle was capable of it — quite; I always said so, Rena.”

“ You’re exactly like a woman, Tommy,” she retorted, frowning, “ you delight in your ‘ I told you sos.’ But we’re going to break the will.”

“ Oh, nonsense,” said Bentinck comfortably, “ suits in chancery are no good; ” then he looked at me again and his wife remembered.

“ Good gracious,” she said, “ it’s Jack Brinton — I thought you knew each other.”

Bentinck shook hands stiffly, but his smile was friendly. He was in fact a dull, easy-going fellow.

“ You’ll come on up to the Albemarle, of course? ” he said.

“ Yes,” put in Lady Serena promptly; “ he takes dinner with us.”

It seemed useless to protest at the moment and I went to the hotel with them, but more in the hope of finding a dispatch from Paris than with any thought of dining with them. However, there was nothing at the office and Lord Bentinck pressed me to join them at table. He had ordered a heavy meal and champagne. I saw no

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signs of retrenchment, though Lady Serena had declared it necessary, and she looked quite content and smiling, her fair hair much curled and puffed and a color in her cheeks. She had evidently told her husband the particulars of the will and he was frankly disappointed.

“He was a mean old duffer,” he remarked, “and he certainly played Rena a bad trick. We ought to have known better than to trust to his generosity.”

“We have to trust somebody,” said Serena plaintively, “though I’m afraid nobody will trust us any more — not even the Jews, Tommy; we’ve banked too much on uncle’s fortune.”

He frowned, looking down at his champagne glass.

“Oh, hang it all!” he said.

“Do!” she said, cheering up at once; “I hate to be so sordid. Besides, it’s a duty to cheer up John Brinton.”

Lord Bentinck turned a slow and deliberate regard upon me and I felt the blood burning in my face.

“I can bear up, Lady Serena,” I said stiffly.

She looked at me a moment with some-

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thing like sympathy and then she began to laugh. Bentinck, meanwhile, glanced from one to the other.

“What on earth is it?” he asked blankly.

Lady Serena dispatched our attendant for some cake.

“John Brinton is suspected of murder, Tommy,” she explained sweetly.

“Good heavens!” exclaimed Lord Bentinck, leaning back in his chair.

I could have shaken Serena, but she never looked prettier in her life, or more gayly at ease.

“It’s quite true,” I said, replying to the interrogation in the Englishman’s eyes.

“’Pon my soul!” he said, “how very extraordinary,” and he raised his eye-glass and viewed me very much as I have seen the little boy at the show view the trick elephant.

“The circumstantial evidence is all against me,” I went on maliciously, “yet I was stupid enough not to know that I was suspected until Lady Bentinck told me. I’m not a desirable guest at supper for they may send after me at any moment.”

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“Nonsense!” said Lord Bentinck warmly, “let me assure you, sir, that I don’t believe a word of it,” and he held out his hand.

Serena giggled wickedly.

“Tommy, dear, it isn’t a bit necessary to be heroic,” she said, “we none of us believe it, and he’s going to help us break the will. He has the draft of the original one with such a lovely provision for me!”

“I can’t follow you,” said Bentinck blankly; “you’re always off like a kite, Rena, and all I can do is to hold on to the string, and I’m not always sure I do that.”

This was so pathetic that Serena only laughed the more. But I proceeded to tell him about the two wills, although I did not feel that she deserved my help at the explanation. He was at once interested and showed to some advantage. He did not want to involve his wife in a long and expensive suit unless his cause was just. I saw that he was slow but absolutely honest even in his mercenary proclivities. He needed money as frankly as he lacked it. He was clay in Serena’s hands and she knew it, but was far too diplomatic to let him realize it, and she managed him as

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skillfully as any general ever maneuvered an army. I could imagine that he made her a very good husband and that his heavy traits balanced her frivolities.

We sat a long while talking it over, so long, in fact, that I began to think of delaying my return until tomorrow. But before we left the table a dispatch came from Lavour. It was in the nature of a surprise.

“Cartouche arrested, charged with crime,” it ran; “poison paper found on him. Get detective to find out at once who bought the poison in a red envelope at Dane’s, 34 Villiers Street, Strand, February second.”

I thrust the paper into my pocket without explaining its contents to the Bentincks. It was a weak revenge, no doubt, on Lady Serena, for I saw that she was consumed with curiosity, especially when I announced my intention of staying over until the next day.

“What a concession to common sense,” she remarked.

“That means to your convictions, doesn’t it?” I replied, still ruffled.

Lord Bentinck looked puzzled. He rep-

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resented a different type and he could not quite make us out, but he was indulgent.

“ Delighted, I’m sure,” he drawled.

Whereupon his wife burst out laughing.

“ Oh, Tommy, you’re so droll,” she said, an explanation that left him more blankly at loss than ever.

But she could not bear the suspense. I went with them to the elevator and it was there that she gave way to her curiosity.

“ Jack,” she said, “ I’m simply dying to know what was in that dispatch.”

I bowed.

“ I wish you good night, Lady Bentinck,” I said, with a sardonic grin.

She gave me a look of deep exasperation and followed her lord into the elevator. As they ascended I sent a message to Scotland Yard. It was very late and they promised me a first class man in the morning, and I went to bed determined to get some rest, but I confess that I got very little sleep. Serena’s revelations and Lavaur’s telegram gave me cause enough for reflection. To be suspected of the cold-blooded and deliberate murder of a man who had been my lifelong friend was too much for flesh and blood to bear, and Lady

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Serena's frivolity was almost brutal. I felt that I had a grievance. Yet, when I thought it over, it was simple enough. I should have seen it if I had been an observer instead of an actor. I had been there in the house, I had tasted the same wine, my glass was beside his, I was the last person outside the household who had been with him, I was mixed up in his lawsuits, I had executed his will and was his executor. They might easily imagine a motive where none existed and then it became a strong case against me, as strong, at least, as that against the servants. The marvel was that I had not been at once arrested and then I remembered Lavour's interviewing the *Maire*, and his evident activity, and I suspected that he had turned the tide of suspicion into other channels. My course was clear, however; I should go back and face it out.

The arrest of Cartouche did not convince me; I believed in the old man's innocence, though it seemed that he had doubted mine. It was true that his suspicions might have been a blind, a means of defending himself. That would have been an obvious argument, but still I scouted the idea. He had

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nothing to gain and much to lose; his place was more to him a year than the pittance under the will. And he could not have changed the will and in that strange document, I was convinced, lay the key to the secret.

With these complex emotions, I tossed about all night on a sleepless pillow and was glad to see the day dawn.

The Scotland Yard man arrived at seven o'clock, and I sent for him to come up to my room. His name was James Short and it was not a misapplied cognomen, for he was short of stature though astute. I gave him Lavour's dispatch and briefly outlined the case. He sat down beside the window and listened to me with much the air of a terrier scenting a hot trail, but he said little beyond promising to let me have the desired information by noon that day.

"You anticipate no trouble then?" I remarked dryly, "though I think these things are usually well covered over."

"There'll be a weak spot somewhere, sir," he said, "and it's probably here. They didn't expect this side would be traced."

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“ But after all my friend may have made a mistake,” I suggested.

“ Possibly,” he admitted, “ but the poison was bought. The French police should know by this time if it was bought in Paris.”

“ That is true,” I replied, “ yet there are ways of evading all vigilance.”

He pursed up his lips and said no more, but went off with an alert face.

I took my coffee and chop alone. Lady Serena was not likely to be down until noon and I saw nothing of Lord Bentinck. I went out and bought a French paper and read a brief account of the arrest of Cartouche, who was charged with putting the poison in his master's wine; there were no particulars. I took a cab and drove down to the Strand looking at the shops; I wanted to find the chemist at 34 Villiers Street. Presently we drove past it; it was not a very large shop and quite usual in its appearance and I decided not to go in. I had just consulted my watch and finding that it was nearing noon, I gave the cabman orders to drive back to the hotel. As we turned out of the street, I noticed an omni-

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bus stopping at the crossing for a woman to climb down from the top seat. She was short and stout and dressed in a dark blue suit that was short enough to give an amusing view of a substantial pair of legs and large feet. I noticed that she had blonde hair and wore a large red hat. Afterwards it seemed strange that all these details arrested my attention, for she was very plain and much freckled; decidedly a daughter of the people.

When I got back to the hotel I found Short waiting for me and he handed in his report. It was brief; the poison in one paper, placed in a red envelope marked "poison," was sold on a doctor's prescription — Dr. Henry Deane, 28 Clarges Street,— to a woman who gave her name as Mrs. Patty Atkins, No. 12 Talbot Road, Bayswater. She was short and stout, face broad and freckled, hair yellow, frock blue and hat red, wore dotted face veil. Dr. Henry Deane had left that number when the detective called, address unknown. No such person as Mrs. Patty Atkins had ever been at No. 12 Talbot Road. So far there was no trail.

I laid down the paper.

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“ I saw the woman today,” I said, and described the spot where she was descending from the omnibus.

Short’s face flushed.

“ We’ll get her then, sir,” he said at once.

“ Very well,” I replied, “ I am going back to Paris tonight, can you report by six? ”

“ By five o’clock, sir,” he said.

“ And you’ll find the woman? ” I asked dryly.

“ If she’s in London, sir.”

I looked at my watch. “ Very well,” I replied, “ that will do.”

He went out apparently confident and I ordered my lunch. For my own part, I had grave doubts of his easy success. A crime is usually concealed as well as its perpetrators can manage to conceal it, and I was sure that these criminals, who ever they were, were clever enough to hide their tracks with some care. I was therefore not surprised when the time passed and the detective failed to report.

It was half past five that evening and I had already ordered a cab to take me to Charing Cross station when Short made

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CHAPTER IX

SEARCHING FOR CLEWS

I went straight through, catching the night boat and making Paris on time. Events had marched so rapidly that I had had no time to consider my own situation and when I found myself once more in the hotel in Paris, I did not know whether I was liable to arrest on suspicion of Lloyd's murder or not. All that had passed since that stormy night when I journeyed out to the rue Fontaine St. Georges was as confused as the kaleidoscopic happenings of some ugly dream. But, as the matter crystallized itself in my mind, I became more and more assured that there had been hideous foul play, and that the will produced after his death was a clumsy forgery. If I could but find the original will — but of that I despaired; whoever substituted the false destroyed the genuine document. I had written home to a confidential clerk at my office in Boston to get the copy of the original draft of Lloyd's will that I had

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Who are you tracing now? Bentinck told me you had a Scotland Yard man."

I could not forbear a grim smile at her expense.

"Acting under instructions from Paris, we are hunting the lady with the red hat," I replied pointedly.

"Good gracious!" replied Lady Serena, quite unmoved, "you don't mean that you have become a bill collector, John? It's a love of a hat and I got it on credit. I shouldn't be wearing red if Uncle Lloyd had treated me well, but as it is — it's a positive relief to do something flagrant. Of course, you didn't mean that about hunting a lady with a red hat."

"But I did," I replied, "and I must be off; time and trains wait for no man. I bid your ladyship adieu!" and I started down the steps.

"Wait!" she cried; "wait — tell me about the woman!"

"I'll report from Paris," I called back and made for the cab.

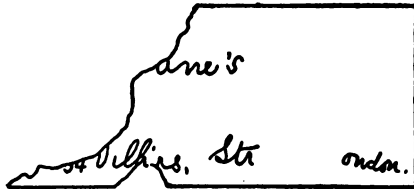
She stood at the top of the steps watching me, and I could see that she was vexed at my flight, for she did not smile when I raised my hat as I drove off.

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the police pounce at once! There you have it."

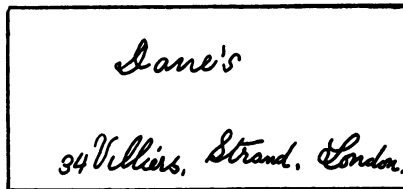
"And the envelope with the Villiers Street address?"

His eyes brightened and he pulled out a fragment of soiled red paper and spread it carefully out on the table between us. It was much rubbed and defaced and partially torn away.



"I don't make much of that," I said.

He smiled and taking out a piece of paper and a pencil, he rapidly drew the square of the envelope and filled in the letters.



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“ Was I wrong? ” he asked, leaning back in his chair and looking at me from under his half shut lids as he smoked.

“ No, you were right, ” I admitted, much amused, “ and it was bought by a woman with a red hat, ” and I briefly recounted my experience.

He was at once interested and approved of my action in putting a Scotland Yard man on the trail.

“ We must get the woman with the red hat, ” he said.

I smiled, thinking of Lady Serena and the milliner’s bill.

“ They are going to dispute the will, ” I remarked.

Lavour nodded. “ I expected that. Bentinck wants money. ”

“ He’s a good fellow — to all appearances, ” I replied, “ and Serena manages him — much as she used to manage us when we were boy admirers of hers. ”

Lavour shrugged his shoulders and fell silent, smoking harder than ever. I was thinking of old Cartouche whom I believed innocent, and I said as much to my companion.

“ He may be, and he may not be, ” he

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replied; "Cartouche may be in some one's pay. My theory is, Brinton, that this may be a case of conspiracy to kill Lloyd and get the estate."

"Then you believe that Andrew Schenck is involved, for he is the beneficiary."

"He is the apparent beneficiary," replied Lavaur, "but there are such things as levying blackmail, etc., on an heir, and I suspect that Schenck would be an easy victim for such sharpers."

"But the motive?" I said skeptically.

"That is it," he retorted, "I'm looking for the motive and the female — it may be the woman with the red hat. Lady Serena admits two visits only to the house, and the woman, Buyse, admits three; that leaves two other visits to be accounted for. By the way, Brinton, can you go with me at once? I want to make a call on the rue de la Chaussée d'Antin."

"On whom?" I inquired, wondering a little at his interest in the case.

"On Mrs. Buyse," he said briefly, throwing his cigarette into the fire.

"You want to pin her down to the number of visits?" I asked, ready to comply if we were likely to gain anything.

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He nodded, and we made our way to the elevator together. It was during our drive to the rue de la Chaussée d'Antin that I remarked upon my surprise at his continued interest in the case.

He flushed and laughed a little.

"I tell you what it is," he said, "at first I was interested on your account; now, I believe that old Frenchman is innocent, but they'll *hang* him unless we can prove him so. Moreover, I have always fancied I had the gift for detective work; it's one of my fads."

"You have a good many," I commented dryly.

"To be sure," he answered good humoredly, "I was born with them."

As he spoke, the cab drew up at the door of an unpretentious, old-fashioned shop on the rue de la Chaussée d'Antin. There was a display of notions and female luxuries in the window below, and above there was a small *pension* kept, as it proved, by one Luce Sapeurs, former maid to Mrs. McHenry, former milliner, present petty shopkeeper and gossip. In reply to our inquiries, she said that Mrs. Buyse was out for the moment but would soon return if

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messieurs would wait. Lavour expressed our willingness to wait ten minutes and she showed us through her shop into a little back room, where she asked us to be seated. The shop bell ringing immediately to announce a customer, she bustled out to attend her counter and left us to our own devices. We were in a small room lighted by only one window on an alley and furnished with a sofa, two chairs, a writing table and a small desk, where Mlle. Sapeurs evidently kept her accounts. From this, a door opened into her bedroom and a curtain was drawn partially across it, almost concealing the small white bed and high bureau. A small porte-folio lay open on the table and as we waited Lavour sat looking at it, at first with slight attention and then with that keen look that sometimes flashed across his face like a revelation of some latent consciousness. We exchanged only a few words because our conversation could be overheard in the shop and also by any one who chanced to be in the hall. I asked no questions, therefore, when I saw Lavour twisting and turning the blotter in the porte-folio and finally making notes from it. He was so intent upon it that he

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was finally taken by surprise. For we were suddenly aware of the approach of some one through the bedroom and he dropped the blotter just as Mrs. Buyse appeared on the threshold. She had evidently come in by a back door and she wore her street dress and hat and carried a small parcel. Though I think she was a little startled at finding us there, her greeting was self-possessed and respectful. She was very glad to see us, she said, and could we tell her if it was really true that the old Frenchman had poisoned poor Dr. Lloyd?

“ We must suppose the accused innocent until he is proved guilty, Mrs. Buyse,” I said lightly, taking the lead as Lavaur seemed to have become suddenly taciturn.

“ Indeed, sir, I hope he is,” she said meekly; “ it’s a mighty wicked thing to think any one could do it to the poor gentleman.”

“ So we think,” I replied; “ and now, Mrs. Buyse, we want your help to clear up things if we can. Are you quite positive about the number of times you visited Dr. Lloyd? ”

“ Quite positive, sir,” she answered at

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once; "I went three times. And I'm sorry that I didn't ask at first for help for Mattie, but I kind of hated to — he was always so open-handed, and indeed, Mr. Brinton, I'm no beggar."

"I understand that, Mrs. Buyse," I said, "but you are positive that you went there three times? Very good, that is all we wanted to know, is it not?" I added, referring to Lavour.

He nodded and rose.

She stood looking at us, her hands folded and her pose that of a highly respectful and respectable servant.

"Is there going to be much trouble, sir?" she asked anxiously, directing her question to me.

"Well, Cartouche is in trouble, certainly," I replied, "and there will be a lawsuit about the will."

She seemed much concerned.

"Indeed, I'm sorry," she said, "on Mr. Schenck's account — and Miss Holland's."

"But Miss Holland is not especially benefited by this will," I remarked, as we moved toward the door.

"I'm told she is to marry Mr. Andy," she said.

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“ Poor soul! ” I commented, shrugging my shoulders.

The woman gave me a quick look, immediately on the defensive.

“ Mr. Andy’s more sinned against than sinning, sir,” she said stoutly; “ he’s always been a kind-hearted young gentleman.”

“ I hope he’ll remember you, Mrs. Buyse,” I replied dryly; “ he ought to — if he gets this immense sum.”

“ I’m not expecting that he’d do more than Dr. Lloyd has,” she responded humbly; “ I’m right thankful.”

“ That’s right, Mrs. Buyse, be humble and be grateful,” said Lavour; “ follow the example of the immortal Uriah.”

She looked at him completely puzzled, and we made our way out, Mlle. Sapeurs courtesying as we passed through the shop. She was a small woman with a yellow face and a curiously hooked nose — like the beak of a parrot.

We got into the cab and Lavour gave an address to the driver.

“ 24 rue Taitbout,” he said.

“ And wherefore? ” I asked, mildly surprised.

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“ *De grâce,*” he replied, lighting a cigarette, “ I do not know. I found the address on a blotter and I am siezed with an uncontrollable desire to meet a gentleman who dwells at No. 24 rue Taitbout.”

“ If we were at home,” I remarked thoughtfully, “ I fancy I should petition the court for a commission of lunacy to inquire into the mental state of Charles Gillette Marie Lavour.”

“ Ah,” he replied dreamily, “ if I had but the brains, the sagacity, the foresight, the relentless enthusiasm of the woman with the platter face! ”

“ It is rather a blessing,” I replied “ that Mrs. Buyse has not read Dickens or you would scarcely have escaped with a whole skin.”

“ My dear Jack,” he replied, with a grin, “ you can always say hateful things with impunity if you have a sufficient amount of cheek.”

I was forced to admit the truth of this remark and then mildly suggested that I should like to know the reason of our pursuit of some unknown individual on the rue Taitbout. He laughed a little.

“ We are going to see one Henry Persi-

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fal," he replied; " Mrs. Buyse has been writing to him recently and I am consumed to have the honor of his acquaintance."

" You found this all out on the blotter? " I remarked, a little scornful of his detective work.

" Precisely," he replied, with a shrug, " it was writ upon the blotter. *À la bonne heure* — I go for the man, but I am looking for the woman — the woman with the red hat."

" Who was not Mrs. Buyse," I said.

" Who was not Mrs. Buyse," he replied, " unless she has found the elixir of youth and the secret of being in two places at once. Ah," he added, " here we are — now for an adventure."

As he spoke, the cab stopped at No. 24 rue Taitbout and we looked up at a plain straight faced Parisian house of the old style, with decorously drawn blinds.

CHAPTER X

NUMBER TWENTY-FOUR RUE TAITBOUT

It was sometime before the bell was answered at the house on the rue Taitbout, and while we waited on the steps, Lavaur looked up from his note-book which he had been consulting.

“By the way, Brinton,” he asked carelessly, “did Lady Serena tell you when she bought her red hat?”

“No, but I concluded that it was a recent purchase,” I replied, “from her reference to it in regard to Dr. Lloyd’s death.”

“It may be quite important later for her to prove that,” he said, putting up his note-book.

“I fancy that the milliner’s bill will do that,” I retorted, with a smile; “all I have to advise you is not to tell Lady Serena that she might be confused with the person answering the description of the purchaser of the poison.”

He shrugged his shoulders. “I shall

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leave that to you," he said; "to lawyers belong the unpleasant dealings — and the boodle!"

As he spoke the door was opened by a decent looking Frenchwoman, evidently above a servant, and probably the owner of the house. Lavour asked at once for Mr. Henry Persifal — speaking in French — and she replied that he was no longer there.

"But he was here on February sixth," said Lavour.

"He left that night, monsieur," she replied, evidently perplexed.

"Ah, to be sure — can you give me his London address?" asked my amateur detective suavely.

At this she stared.

"He went to Berlin, monsieur," she said, and almost shut the door in our faces; "I don't know his address."

"I am very sorry," said Lavour calmly; "I have news of his grandfather's illness and I am anxious to communicate it."

At that the door came open a little way.

"I am sorry, monsieur," she said hesitating, "it was somewhere on the Wilhelm-Strasse —"

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“Precisely, madame,” said Lavaur sweetly, “number — number —? Let me see — I used to know that address —”

But she would go no further; she protested that she did not know and I thought it probable that she told the truth. However, my indefatigable friend was by no means done with her. He had begun to win his way by that charm of manner that made him popular everywhere, and he had gradually induced her to open her door wider and listen to him without the suspicion she had at first exhibited.

“You have not yet rented Persifal’s rooms,” he said.

“No, monsieur, but —” she hesitated, eyeing me with more hostility than the arch conspirator.

“I should like to see them, madame,” said Lavaur, stepping jauntily across the threshold; “your house has an inviting and immaculate appearance.”

This flattery went to her heart. She no longer demurred but showed us into the house. Persifal’s rooms were in the rear and she opened them for our inspection, raising the shades and pushing aside the

NO. 24 RUE TAITBOUT

spotless white muslin curtains. Her house was plainly furnished but with some taste, and it really deserved Lavour's eulogium. The windows looked out on to a small, high walled garden and over that at the backs of the houses on the rue Fontaine St. Georges. I stood looking out while my companion asked about the price of the rooms and other particulars, evidently designing to disarm madame's suspicions of our errand. While he was talking, the bell rang and she went out rather reluctantly, I thought, to answer it. Left alone, Lavour began at once to examine the rooms minutely.

"When will you be done with this farce?" I asked grimly; "the woman has set her house in order and garnished it. What could you find in the wake of a broom and a dustpan?"

He smiled and went on without replying. He looked at everything and finally opened the empty bureau drawers a little way, peering in them one by one. I began to grow hot; police methods are well enough in their place but there is a limit to what belongs to a gentleman. But he

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ignored my movement toward the door and in the very bottom drawer he found a half sheet of paper.

“ Look here, Gillette, drop that! ” I said sternly; “ this passes —— ”

But I was interrupted by the frou-frou of madame’s skirts in the hall and he coolly thrust his trophy into his pocket.

She came in looking from one to the other with rather an anxious face.

“ Is monsieur pleased? ” she demanded politely.

“ I will let you know — inside the week — if I decide to take these rooms, ” replied Lavour cheerfully, and complimented her upon their appearance.

She was so pleased that she accompanied us to the street door, expressing the hope that monsieur would decide to take the apartments. She had just had another offer but she would wait a few days. He thanked her with genial cordiality and frisked off with a light heart while I followed with the feelings and, no doubt, the air of a criminal, for she gazed narrowly at me with evident dislike.

When we were in the cab I turned upon Lavour.

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“ See here, Gilette,” I said sternly, “ I’m not the Prefect of Police and I’m not authorized to intrude into people’s houses and steal papers out of their bureau drawers. I’m as eager as you are to track out this mystery, but I haven’t the face to go on at this rate.”

“ My dear Brinton, you never said a truer word,” he replied, with great coolness; “ you looked like a highwayman in disguise, a burglar caught in the act — you didn’t even rise to the bravado of a first-class horse thief.”

And he paused to draw the paper out of his pocket and unfold it.

“ This is positively bare-faced,” I remarked, leaning back in my corner of the cab.

But he ignored me and studied his treasure. I could see that it was only a fragment and contained nothing but a drawing. He laughed a little and handed it to me.

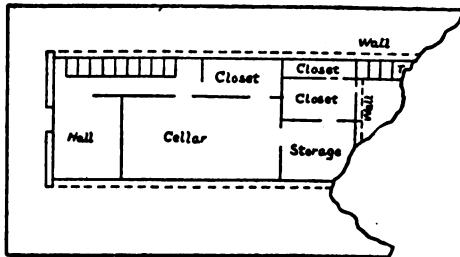
“ Not much on the face of it,” he said; “ you can spare your heroics. Madame will not miss it.”

“ I can find it in my heart to wish she

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would and pursue you," I retorted dryly, but I looked at the paper.

It was a rough sketch, apparently of the ground plan of a house, half of it being torn away. It seemed to have no especial usefulness.



The Torn Plan.

"What do you make of it?" asked Lavaur, chuckling as I turned it about scornfully enough.

"Nothing," I replied promptly, "except that it is not madame's because of the English words on it."

"Exactly, they are not German, you see," he said; "my dear fellow, you are improving. Live and learn!"

I turned to toss the paper out of the carriage window, but he snatched it and put

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it in his pocket again. I shrugged my shoulders.

“As you please,” I said, “but, at least, where you steal I shall not be your ‘fence.’”

“My dear Brinton, I shouldn’t dream of employing you,” he retorted, “you are too clumsy. By the way, I haven’t told you that I have succeeded in leasing Lloyd’s house, but I had to fight for it, and who do you suppose wanted it?”

I shook my head. “Can’t imagine,” I said; “people are usually superstitious about such houses. I had no idea you would have any difficulty in securing it.”

“Well, I did,” said he, “and my rival was an American, old Hez Portman of Lynn.”

I was thoroughly surprised.

“This is singular,” I said, “in view of the whole case. Do you know about the lawsuit for the hundreth acre?”

“I know that Lloyd had a land lawsuit, yes,” Gillette replied, “but nothing more — if I did know, I’ve forgotten.”

“Well, I’ll tell you,” I said, lighting my cigar at his cigarette; “the two farms adjoin each other in Essex County, not far

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from Lynn. They were bought respectively by Lloyd's father and this Portman's mother. Dr. Lloyd — about thirty years ago — had a new survey made of his land and found that his line had been invaded by his neighbor and promptly moved his fence into the hundredth acre. It seems that on that side he had previously had the whole of the ninety-nine acres and a portion of the hundredth. By the new survey he had the whole of the hundredth; he found that it lay within his father's original purchase. Hez Portman immediately protested and disputed the new survey, producing the original deed to his mother from the former owners of the land. There has been a quarrel ever since and a suit for years, appealed and appealed. It's going to the Supreme Court now on Lloyd's appeal, and old Portman is as bitter about that acre as if it were his only one; but why he should want to hire Lloyd's house — or rather the house in which Lloyd was murdered — I cannot imagine. Perhaps, it is a gruesome joy in his enemy's death."

Lavaur whistled softly; he had been lis-

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tening intently and now he began to rub his hands gently.

“ This grows really delightful,” he remarked. “ I almost wish I’d let him have it. *À la bonne heure*, who’s that — do I dimly remember that portly figure? ”

We were nearing my quarters and there on the steps — as large as life — stood old Hez Portman.

“ The plot thickens,” I said.

As I spoke the cab stopped and no sooner did I step to the pavement than Hez Portman accosted me.

“ This is Mr. John Brinton, I think? ” he said stiffly.

“ The same,” I replied coldly; at the moment I actually disliked the man.

“ A word with you,” he said, with that air which belongs to business success — of being accustomed to consideration.

I hesitated, but Lavaur gave me a warning touch.

“ Very well,” I said, “ you will step this way, Mr. Portman,” and I led him into a retired corner of the reading-room, leaving Lavaur in the lobby.

Portman seated himself opposite to me

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at one of the small tables littered with French and English papers. He was short and heavy, with a bullet head and the pugnacious, snub-nosed face of a Boston bull-dog. He leaned forward and resting his broad, short-fingered hands on the table, viewed me with shrewd calculation.

“ I believe you’re the junior counsel for the defense in the case of Portman versus Lloyd,” he remarked, after a moment of silent inspection.

“ Quite so,” I replied stiffly.

“ Well,” he continued, without noting my manner, “ I’m here to speak of it. Lloyd’s dead and I presume his heirs ain’t as set on that issue as he was;” he stopped, looking at me tentatively. “ Of course they wouldn’t feel as he did,” he added.

“ Of that I am in no position to speak,” I retorted, as he seemed to be waiting for my answer.

“ Indeed? ” he said, “ but I guess I’m right about it for all that. Now, I’m going to win that suit, Mr. Brinton.”

“ I presumed that was your opinion,” I said dryly, “ or you would not have pursued the matter so determinedly. However, I must beg to differ with you.”

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“Very likely,” he replied, waving his hand; “it is not necessary to discuss our opinions. I suppose you’ll be willing to admit that the suit is a great expense to the estate and always has been — and will be until it is concluded. In fact, it’ll cost more than the hundredth acre.”

I began to see his drift and assumed an air of profound indifference, playing with the paper knife. He fidgeted a little in his chair and then settled his elbows squarely on the table.

“The estate can’t be settled for thirteen months,” he went on, bridging my silence, “and I reckon these French courts will make it more of a fandango still. I’ve been looking into the French laws in regard to the wills of aliens, at least, my man of business has; I can’t do any of this polly-Francey and I don’t want to; it’s all d —— d parrot talk anyway. Besides, speaking of the estate, it’s got to be divided, and there ain’t going to be any one of ’em as rich as Lloyd was. Now I’m here to make a plain offer. I wouldn’t have given Hen Lloyd the scrapings of a potato, let alone an inch of dirt, but he’s dead and I don’t feel called on to fight the

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others. I'm willing to make certain concessions if they'll make others and get up a compromise."

"It strikes me, Mr. Portman, that your offer is an admission of weakness," I said, with a sardonic grin. "It is not usual for the stronger side to offer to compromise."

"Haven't I won out on the last appeal, young man?" he said sharply, bending his brows and scowling fiercely at me. "What do you want to stand out for and run the estate in any deeper?"

"I rather think the estate can stand it," I retorted coolly. "In my opinion, Dr. Lloyd thought more of that hundredth acre than he did of the other ninety and nine."

"Lloyd was a blasted fool!" he exclaimed wrathfully. "He hadn't any more right to that hundredth acre than a hen has to a duck's egg. I see well enough that you are an obstinate lawyer, and you don't care how it goes as long as you get your money out of it."

"If that is all you have to say, Mr. Portman, we may as well close the interview," I said coldly.

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He flushed darkly and his strong hands gripped the table.

“ You’ve got to listen to me, Brinton,” he said angrily. “ I’m offering your clients a compromise and you’ve got to attend to their business.”

“ I am not at all sure that I shall continue to represent the estate,” I said, rising. “ I refer you to Mr. Andrew Schenck.”

He did not rise but sat looking at me warily, his pugnacious face full of fight.

“ Do you mean to say that it’s true — what I’ve read in the papers —” he said, “ that Andy Schenck’s got the whole outfit and cheated those girls? ”

“ The terms of the will have been published, I believe,” I replied, taking out a cigar and clipping the end.

“ By Jove! ” he ejaculated, and rose, too, his face deeply flushed; “ I reckon I can handle Andy Schenck without gloves and get him in a corner at that! Oh, I’ve got him hard and fast! I rather fancy that he’ll compromise double quick, if I want him to. Can you give him a message? ”

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I did not reply at once and almost at the moment a servant brought me a card.

“The gentleman is waiting in the lobby, m’sieur,” he said.

I took up the little square of pasteboard and looked at it, conscious that old Hez Portman was watching every movement with strange eagerness, and I was certain he detected my displeasure at reading the name of my visitor.

It was Andrew Schenck.

I handed the card to Portman. “You may see him now if you wish,” I said, with a shrug; “I can forego the honor for a while.”

But he was no longer eager. His manner relaxed; he gave me a look that was intended to convey a cunning satisfaction and he picked up his tall silk hat.

“You can write me when you have considered my offer,” he said, throwing a card with his address on it on the table. “I ran over for a few months for my health and I ain’t going back up to Boston until — things get shaped.”

CHAPTER XI

ANDREW SCHENCK

Leaving one strange visitor in the reading-room, I went out to meet another in the lobby. I had no desire to see Schenck; I had never liked him and his presence now was most unwelcome. I knew that I was likely to be one of the chief actors in the suit that was to come to break the will, and that he would therefore soon regard me as an enemy, however he might think of me now. In point of fact, he was so peculiar a character that I had never been able to quite make him out. He had plenty of ability, but he never used it in the right direction, and spent much time in wasting his talents. He was a dandy in dress and I found him in the lobby attired in a long gray overcoat with a fur collar and a broad band of crape on his left arm and crape half way up his silk hat. He had always had a colorless complexion and very light eyes, but his hair

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was intensely black. There was not a trace of resemblance to any of the Lloyds in his coarse, irregular features, though the likeness was strong in that family.

He greeted me with an indifference that was either real or exceedingly well feigned, and, as I did not invite him to my rooms, we went into the reading-room, just missing old Portman as we entered the door. Schenck came to the point at once.

“Gibbs has told me about the will,” he said, “and about your position. I suppose I ought to have sent him to you, but I came myself. Of course, it’s all nonsense about the other will.”

He looked at me a little as if he intended to intimidate me.

“I’m not prepared to say anything just now, Mr. Schenck,” I said curtly; I had not sat down nor asked him to be seated, but he ignored that discourtesy.

“You might as well speak out,” he said flatly. “Gibbs told the whole thing. You said it was not the will you witnessed — or drew — and yet the date is the same. I know that my cousin Serena is set on having the lion’s share, but I can’t see the use of an expensive suit for nothing. I tell

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you now, Brinton, I'll fight it to the last ditch."

"To the hundredth acre?" I asked coolly.

I was watching him at the time and could have sworn that he turned pale.

"I wasn't aware that Serena was interested in that," he said sharply.

I was feeling in the dark but I seemed to have touched a sore spot.

"How about Miss Holland?" I suggested.

He faced me squarely and his eyes shone.

"I'll take care of Miss Holland," he said defiantly.

"Am I to congratulate you?" I asked indifferently.

He stared at me. "We'll drop that," he said.

"Quite so," I agreed amiably; "I shall know more when I see Miss Holland."

"You're not her counsel," he replied.

"I was commissioned by Dr. Lloyd to see her," I said, "and I have a great respect for a dead man's wishes."

"You can spare yourself all trouble about her affairs," he answered sullenly; "she's going to marry me."

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“ She’s evidently a lady of taste,” I said ironically.

He looked at me quickly and frowned, but it suited him to pass it over.

“ You’re giving Serena bad advice, Brinton,” he went on, “ it will be expense for nothing. If she fights, I fight, but if she lets things alone — there might be — why, I’ll be frank; I’m not really inclined to be ungenerous; I’m willing to make a suitable provision for her and that English husband of hers. It would suit her interests better if you’d ask for a compromise instead of flinging defiance at me.”

I laughed outright.

“ Haven’t you come here to fling defiance at us? ” I asked.

“ You’ve met my overtures with hostility,” he replied, walking about among the tables and staring angrily at the two or three men who had strayed into the room and picked up papers in the opposite corner.

“ I think you had better leave all this to your lawyer,” I remarked coolly; “ you’re not likely to handle it successfully.”

“ I should think you’d be all the more

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eager to make terms with me," he replied.

I shrugged my shoulders.

"It is only those who have a bad case who are eager for a compromise," I retorted.

"There's no doubt about the strength of my case," he replied sharply; "it can't be assailed, but I'm willing to do something for Serena — if she listens to reason, but I be hanged if I will if she follows your lead, John Brinton."

"Thank you," I said; "if that is all, Schenck, we understand each other and I need not detain you longer, but let me advise you not to make any arrangements with Mr. Hez Portman until this matter of the will is definitely settled," and with this I went to the elevator and left him to find his way out alone.

I went up to my room reflecting upon some curious impressions. I could not immediately imagine what there could be between Hez Portman and Andy Schenck which could make the latter afraid of the former. Yet I had an idea that there was something — and something definite enough to dash Schenck's usual effrontery. I had been on the stretch for some days

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now and was thoroughly tired of the whole painful affair, so it was anything but a pleasant surprise to find Lavaur coolly smoking his endless cigarettes in my rooms. My face probably betrayed me, for he smiled rather maliciously as I entered.

“Bear up, Jack,” he said affably, “I had another suggestion to make—so I waited.”

“There is a limit to all human endurance,” I replied, “and I reached it just now in an interview with Andrew Schenck.”

He laughed. “I dodged him in the lobby,” he said; “I could not imagine his errand.”

I told him and he whistled his delighted surprise.

“My dear Jack,” he said genially, “the fellow knows he’s got a weak case. By the way, you’ve got a dispatch on your table. Is it likely to be from Short?”

I opened it hastily; it was brief.

“Woman with red hat took passage on American Red Star liner, ‘City of New York,’ on Thursday; registered as Mrs. Sarah Mattisby.”

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Lavaur looked disappointed. "The fool let her slip," he said, and then taking the dispatch he read it carefully and pocketed it. "By your leave, Jack," he said cheerfully, "and now — I want you to go with me to see Cartouche."

"Certainly," I replied dryly; "why not the Emperor of China?"

"Just as you like."

"Are we to trace that red hat in New York?" I asked.

He nodded. "If you can get a good man."

"I shall have to consider it, and now I suppose the immediate step is Cartouche."

"After lunch," he replied coolly, and proceeded to invite himself to lunch at my expense with the greatest possible equanimity.

While we were at table I suggested that we had made but little progress in our attempts to trace out the case and that it looked to me like a closed problem.

"We know that the poison was bought by a woman wearing a red hat, in a London shop, a few days before the death of Lloyd," he said composedly.

"We suppose so," I corrected dryly.

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“Is there any absolute proof?”

He shrugged his shoulders. “The envelope was in Lloyd’s room, the poison in his glass. Now, it’s for us to find out how they got there. It is not likely that he accepted either the envelope or its contents as a present from any one of his visitors. It is still less probable that he employed any one to purchase it for him. And the fact that it was purchased in London — to my mind — throws Cartouche out of the case.”

“I have never suspected Cartouche,” I remarked.

“But I have,” he said, “and there are still possibilities — that he may have been hired, etc., but they do not appeal strongly to me. As for old Marie, she hasn’t the nerve — though poison cases are far more probably traced to a woman than a man.”

“You mean that a woman hates to see blood?”

He nodded and rose from the table, having finished a hearty meal in an incredibly short time. For my part, I had no appetite and had eaten nothing.

A few moments later we were driving

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rapidly along the quays toward the Boulevard Mazas. Cartouche was confined in the Nouvelle Force prison, constructed on the spot made famous by La Force. Lavaur had obtained a card of admission from the Prefect of Police and after some little delay we were shown into the *parloir* of one of the ground floor galleries and found ourselves seated in a little stall with iron grates. There are seven stalls in each *parloir* of this prison; a stall for the visitor and opposite a stall for the prisoner, also grated, and the guard walks between these two rows so that no paper or suspicious parcel can change hands. We had to wait quite a while, however, before the gaoler brought the prisoner and put him in the opposite stall. The old concierge came up to the grate and laying his hands on it to steady himself, he peered at us with some eagerness, but at the sight of me his face changed sharply. Imprisonment and excitement had told much on the old fellow and he looked more bowed and brown than ever. We both greeted him and I at once expressed my regret that he had been committed during my absence.

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He stood, still holding the grate, but looking down and he did not raise his eyes when he replied.

“ You know I am innocent, m’sieur,” he said pointedly.

“ I certainly believe you to be so, Cartouche,” I replied, and added, “ or I should not be here. I am determined that you shall have good counsel for your defense.”

Then he raised his eyes to give me a quick, furtive glance.

“ M’sieur is kind,” he said sullenly.

“ Cartouche,” struck in Lavour, “ we have succeeded in tracing the poison paper to an English chemist and that will be of service to you at your trial.”

“ Perhaps you can also find out who bought it, m’sieur,” he replied, with some bitterness. “ I am a poor old man, with few friends and it is not likely that they will make much effort to save me.”

“ It was bought by a woman,” I said, “ but as yet we do not know who she was.”

“ A woman? ” he repeated slowly, giving me for the first time a keen, direct look; “ a woman, m’sieur? ”

“ Certainly, a woman,” I replied stiffly.

“ Cartouche,” said Lavour, “ you are

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quite positive that you can recall nothing more — which occurred during the day previous to Dr. Lloyd's death?"

The old concierge shook his head.

"What is the use, m'sieur?" he said sternly, "there must be some one accused — how easy to accuse a poor old man — of no consequence! I have told all I know; how I went out and bought the bottle of medicine for my rheumatism. I was not again absent. I let in Mr. Brinton, I let him out; at that time I heard M. le Docteur speak; he gave some orders and went back to his room and drank the wine. I never saw him alive again. It was all very simple, m'sieur."

"I have taken the house, Cartouche," said Lavaur carelessly.

The old man stared at him, his jaw dropping.

"*Sacré Vierge Marie!*" he ejaculated, and crossed himself devoutly "m'sieur runs a great risk."

"And why?" inquired my companion, with great tranquillity.

"M'sieur must know," replied the concierge, "that the spirits of the murdered walk."

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“ Ah, then you are sure that Dr. Lloyd was murdered? ” I remarked quickly.

His face changed and he looked down again; his hands tightened on the grate.

“ M’sieur knows,” he said sullenly.

And we could draw no more from him. In a few minutes therefore Lavaur closed the interview and the guard conducted us out of our stall through the long corridor to the hall of observation which occupies nearly the whole of the centre of the prison. The formalities of the exit over, we entered our cab and started back toward the quays, both breathing more freely out of the atmosphere of the jail.

“ Poor old devil,” I remarked, as I looked out at the sunshine on the boulevard and thought of the old bowed figure behind the grate.

“ He means to accuse you at his trial, Brinton,” said Lavaur gravely.

“ So I suspected,” I replied coolly; “ I am not unprepared. Lady Serena broke it to me none too gently. Poor old Cartouche expects to put me in his place, but ‘ there’s many a slip ’twixt the cup and the lip.’ Lavaur, he didn’t want you in that house.”

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Lavour grinned. "So I thought," he said, "that's one reason why I'm there. Come over to supper tomorrow night, Jack."

I shook my head. "I can't do it," I said; "I should see Lloyd pour out that Chateau Yquem. Lavour, I admire your nerve."

"My dear fellow," he drawled, "it's want of nerve—I never had any; nothing ruffles me. Give me a match for this cigarette."

"You'll have nerves fast enough at the pace you're going," I remarked, as I handed the light.

"You'll come over tomorrow night?" he persisted.

"Yes,—but not to supper."

CHAPTER XII

ANICE

The next morning brought me two letters; one from Lady Serena announcing that she and her husband would be in Paris in a day or two to attend to the formalities in regard to Lloyd's will, the other from a Mrs. Charlotte Erckmann, an aunt on the paternal side of Anice Holland. She wrote from Meurice's and stated that she and her niece had arrived there the day before and that she desired to see me on business by ten in the morning. This was a complete surprise, for remembering Dr. Lloyd's letter from these very people, I could not imagine how they had raised the money to come over at once. The whole affair—the sudden death of Lloyd, the eager arrival of the relatives who hoped to batten on the estate, and the preparations for a pitched battle over the will—put me painfully in mind of the rapidity with which birds of prey gather over a carcass. I was not without some curiosity,

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however, about these people, especially since Schenck's announcement that he intended to marry the girl, so I determined to go at once to the hotel, although it was impossible to keep the appointment as I had not received her letter until a quarter of eleven.

It was about noon when I sent up my card to Mrs. Erckmann. At the moment, I remember that I was thinking of my promise to Lloyd to go to see Anice Holland, and I recollected, too, Lady Serena's dread of this unknown relative. I had not asked for the girl as I came in response to the aunt's summons, and was not at all sure that I should see her at this interview. I had to wait some time before a message came down asking me to Mrs. Erckmann's private parlor. I went up in the elevator with a little amused surprise at the extravagance of a suite of rooms at Meurice's, and wondering if the man Gibbs had informed them of the terms of the will and the probability of a suit.

Mrs. Erckmann's parlor was, however, on a much more modest scale than Lady Serena's had been, and I had hardly entered it before the opposite door opened to

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admit a young girl. My first impression of Anice Holland that day was of a tall slender young creature with a great deal of brown hair and an upward tilt to the chin. Fifteen minutes later I had accumulated fifteen other impressions, each one different from the other. She came straight toward me, holding out her hand with a perfectly charming and cheerful smile.

“ I know you didn't come to see me,” she said, “ but aunt is out and I am the substitute.”

“ But I did come to see you,” I replied, “ I am under a promise to the late Dr. Lloyd to see you as soon as possible.”

She gave me a quick look of surprise which revealed the fact that her eyes were of a peculiar dark gray and black lashed.

“ I had no idea that my uncle cared a rush about me,” she remarked, with great candor, and then she laughed a little; “ he certainly never showed any particular interest in me.”

“ That was because he did not know you,” I retorted, wondering greatly at the preference that had always been shown for the elder cousin.

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“ I think he never wanted to know me,” she flashed back; “ I was a poor relation. You remember what Charles Lamb says about them? ”

“ Like your uncle, Charles Lamb did not know you,” I said, with gallantry.

She drew a chair nearer the window and waved her hand to a seat opposite.

“ Tell me about Dr. Lloyd,” she said; “ did he really wish to see me? ”

I felt some qualms of conscience at this and evaded the issue.

“ He was desirous of knowing something of you and of your wish to study music,” I said lamely.

She looked up at me, laughing a little wickedly.

“ That is the poorest little evasion,” she said; “ he wanted to know if I was worth paying for! But I want to tell you, Mr. Brinton, that I never wrote to him about it; it was my aunt. I had no wish to be a beggar on his bounty. I’m afraid that I felt intensely proud and hateful about it all, and now they tell me that the poor man was poisoned by his concierge. It is very gruesome and I really feel very sorry. I believe it is usual for the relatives to re-

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joyce over the prospect of inheriting the property, but I hate it all."

She had the fresh frank manner of a school-girl, and I could not imagine her affianced to Schenck.

"You are not generously treated under this will," I remarked; "you and your cousin, Lady Serena, are rather left out; she intends to dispute it."

The girl leaned forward a little and let her clasped hands fall on her knee.

"Tell me about Lady Serena," she said, as if the will were altogether a secondary matter.

"She is your cousin," I replied, "and she is very handsome, very charming, very happy,—and she is married to a titled Englishman."

Anice swept this all aside with a gesture of disdain.

"Why I have known that for years," she said; "I want to know what she is really like?"

I held my hat inverted in my hands and I looked reflectively into the crown.

"I am sure I cannot define it," I replied; "she is like Lady Serena."

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“ Oh,” she cried brightly, “ that explains it all — I quite understand.”

I stared a little blankly.

“ Don't you see? ” she continued, seeing my bewilderment, “ I know what you mean, she is individual, she is original; she is — in short — a personage.”

“ Yes,” I admitted, with a sigh of relief, “ I evidently conveyed it; she is decidedly a personage.”

“ And he isn't,” said the girl.

“ Who, Bentinck? Not exactly,” I replied hopelessly; “ you are evidently a mind reader.”

“ No,” she declared, “ only I make deductions. Of course, a personage rarely marries a personage! I am so glad about Lady Serena, because I want to like her.”

She gave me another look now and I thought her eyes were decidedly blue. Their particular shade of color was beginning to interest me keenly. I almost lost the thread of the conversation.

“ Lady Serena is coming in a few days,” I said lamely.

“ Then I shall see her and decide about her,” remarked this young person calmly,

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as though her decision would dispose of Serena; "you said she was going to dispute the will?"

I nodded. "She is not likely to give up all to your cousin, Mr. Schenck."

She gave me a quick, sidelong glance and folded her hands demurely.

"I am so glad that you do not like Andrew," she remarked.

"Did I say so?" I asked.

She shook her head. "Not in words, but in voice and manner — yes," she retorted, and then she leaned forward a little, holding up a warning finger. "But be careful before Aunt Erckmann; she adores him."

"Good gracious!" I exclaimed, "and wherefore?"

"Chiefly because he looks like some one else," she retorted calmly; "he looks like a delightful, far away admirer of Aunt Erckmann's, who died young and devoted."

"And is so long remembered?"

"Of course," she laughed softly, "a woman never forgets the man who loved her long ago."

"That is the most consoling thing you have told me," I said.

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“ It is true; ” she nodded her head wisely at me.

“ Then why are they so often flouted? ”

“ Because, ” she looked down demurely, “ because a woman usually marries the man she loves — when she can! ”

“ And it does not follow that it is mutual? ”

She was quite serious now.

“ The French say, ‘ *en amour, toujours un qui aime l'autre,* ’ ” she quoted, and then added with a sudden merry laugh, “ I do not know! ”

“ Not even from Mr. Schenck? ”

She shrugged her shoulders with a grimace.

“ I wonder why you bring up Andrew Schenck? ” she asked coldly.

“ He told me he was going to marry you. ”

She flushed crimson and flashed a furious glance at me.

“ How dared he? ”

I laughed a little. “ How long have you known Andy? ” I inquired, with a feeling of relief.

“ Long enough to despise him, ” she said promptly; “ marry him, indeed! Why, I

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am not even sure that he is divorced. The impertinence! ”

She rose from her chair and went to the window, looking out in evident agitation. I rose also and stood waiting to make my adieux. At last she turned and came toward me. Her face was quite pale and her eyes shone; she was very charming, very young, very natural.

“ Mr. Brinton, need this will make a great delay? ” she asked; “ can't I compromise — or do something? Oh, you don't understand! But the money — it seems so little to Lady Serena, to me ” — she drew her breath, “ to me it means liberty! ”

“ You should have more, much more, ” I declared decidedly; “ the will is an outrage and a fraud, ” and I told her all that Dr. Lloyd had said to me.

“ I do not care, ” she replied, “ I do not care! I am not greedy for money, and that sum would make me my own mistress, would free me from these horrid obligations, these — ” she stopped, blushing furiously.

I began to wonder who had lent the money for this trip; to whom she was in-

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debted — or rather to whom her aunt was indebted?

“ Do not sell your birthright for a mess of pottage,” I said tritely.

“ Then it is certain that there will be a contest? ” she said; her face was changed — greatly changed as she looked at me.

After all, she was playing into Schenck’s hands; I was completely puzzled.

“ There is no doubt that there will be a contest,” I replied stiffly.

She sighed and stood looking down.

“ I suppose that Mr. Gibbs, Mr. Schenck’s attorney and yours, has made it all clear to you,” I added.

“ He is not my attorney — if he is Andrew’s,” she declared quickly.

“ I understood that he was.”

“ Who is to fight for Lady Serena’s interests? ” she asked, giving me a quick glance from under her long lashes.

“ I am,” I said.

She did not reply for a moment; there was an indefinable change in her manner, and then she held out her hand.

“ It is one o’clock,” she said sweetly, “ and I am engaged to see a music teacher at this moment — but — ” she smiled;

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“ will you be my attorney also, Mr. Brington? ”

I confess that I was blushing like a school boy.

“ If you can trust me,” I said.

“ Should I have asked you otherwise? ” and I became uncertain again about the color of her eyes; were they violet?

A little later I found my way back to my hotel and tried to be certain whether I was eating mutton chop or bird of Paradise for lunch. And this was the country bumpkin whom Dr. Lloyd and Lady Serena had rather dreaded. Ye gods! If anything, she was more charming than her cousin; if she had not the regular features of a classical beauty, she had that indefinable charm that is far more dangerous. I smiled a little, in spite of my anger, at Schenck's pretensions. It was true that Anice Holland was a poor girl and he, if the will stood, a millionaire — but I was sharply determined that the will should not stand. I wrote a cable at once to the senior counsel in the case of Portman versus Lloyd, asking him to employ a detective at once to meet the Red Star liner, City of New York, and inquire into the case of the

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woman with the red hat. I wrote a note to Lady Serena informing her of the arrival of her cousin and of her willingness to join her interests with hers. I was in a state of feverish eagerness about the case; the discovery of the murderer — if there was one — and the exposure of the fraudulent will had never seemed so important. Cartouche's suspicions of me assumed a new aspect; if he openly accused me it would lead to embarrassing complications and, perhaps, greatly hinder my activity and my usefulness. I may have been said to have had my *mauvais quart d'heure* that afternoon as I reflected on these things, walking on the Champs Elysées. I tried to divert my mind with the gayety of the promenade, the beautiful women, the handsome equipages — but I could not. The tall gaunt figure of Dr. Lloyd haunted me, standing at the head of the stairs, bidding me a cheery farewell. The conviction that he had been foully dealt with grew upon me. I could not shake it off; I did not relish my dinner and I found myself in a hurry to go out to the rue Fontaine St. Georges to see Lavaur.

Yet, as I approached the grim front of

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the old house I felt the strongest repugnance to entering it. I had not Lavour's skeptical indifference to sentiment, but then it was true that he had had no attachment to Lloyd and none of my recollections. As I rang it seemed impossible that any one but old Cartouche should answer, and I almost fancied that I heard his shuffling step in the porter's room, but it was Lavour himself who opened the door. He laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"Behold me alone," he said; "not a servant will stay after nightfall — for love or money."

"I admire your courage," I replied, as we ascended the stairs together; "I do not know but what I sympathize with the commonalty. I seem to see Dr. Lloyd here at this very landing, to hear his voice in the room beyond."

Lavour laughed again, thrusting his hands into his pockets and sauntering into the study ahead of me. It might have been the very night of February sixth. The same lamp was lighted, the same dark portières drawn, the same table with two glasses and a bottle — but a less costly one of claret. Lavour took Lloyd's chair.

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“ Are you prepared to see ghosts? ” he asked genially.

“ Almost, ” I replied, still standing on the hearth; “ ’pon my word, Gillette, I do not envy you. The comfort is here, but ‘ something is rotten in the state of Denmark. ’ ”

“ There is, ” he replied, with a whimsical smile, “ I haven’t a doubt of it. What is wrong with you, Brinton; have you had a vision? ”

“ In a way, yes, ” I retorted; “ I have seen Miss Holland. ”

“ Andy Schenck’s fiancée? ”

“ No, ” I replied, so sharply that Lavaur looked up.

“ Ah, ” he said, “ will you present me? ”

I shook my head doubtfully. “ I am not sure, ” I replied.

He shrugged his shoulders. “ I shall see her all the same, ” he remarked cheerfully, and then he rose and walking over to the alcove by the cabinet he rapped on the wall.

“ Spirits? ” I asked scornfully.

He nodded and rapped again a little further on.

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“ Does nothing suggest itself? ” he asked, over his shoulder.

I looked at him attentively. He had never appeared more sane. He wore a loose smoking-jacket and light flannel trousers, his hair, as usual, was slightly dishevelled, the inevitable cigarette was between his fingers.

“ No, ” I said, “ is this a séance? ”

He turned and looked at me quizzically.

“ Did it never occur to you that there must be a space behind here? That this corner of the house is square outside and curved within? Lloyd must have known it—I have no doubt he knew it. ”

“ There is a closet, I presume, ” I said, with some indifference.

Lavour grinned.

“ Come here, monsieur, ” he said, going along the wall, pressing his fingers beside the wainscoting until I heard a soft click. Then he lifted the velvet curtain behind the cabinet and there was a draught of cool air.

The side of the wall had opened in a narrow place—opened swiftly and mysteriously. He struck a match and lighting a

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lamp held it up over his head, pointing downward with the other hand. I looked curiously through the opening and saw a narrow space like a closet with a large hole in the floor.

“ It is a secret stair,” he said.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SECRET STAIR

Lavaur and I stood looking at the steep, narrow stair that descended from this niche in the wall of Lloyd's study. My companion's lamp cast but a feeble ray downward, and the steps seemed to drop suddenly out of our sight into the infernal regions. A mouldy smell and mysterious sounds came up to us, the strange noises of an old house. I saw that we were standing in a narrow passage between the inner and the outer walls. Here steps descended; behind Lavaur two or three steps ascended to a door. The house dated back to Francis First, one of the few old rookeries remaining in modern Paris, and the plan of it all flashed upon me in an instant.

"This was the last resort," I said; "see, there is the door in the turret where a stand could be made; these stairs lead downward to some means of escape. Where is the opening below?"

"Come down and see," replied Lavaur,

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“ I found this passage this morning. I have been looking for the opening to it for days.”

“ This is why you took the house? ” I suggested, following him as he lighted our descent between gray unplastered walls.

“ Not altogether,” he said, stopping to show me a broken step, “ but I had a theory and this goes a long way toward strengthening it.”

“ You think an assassin crept up this way? ”

“ It is very possible,” he replied, plunging down into yet deeper shadows.

The way was so narrow that we grazed our elbows and a stumble would have plunged us headlong.

“ One man could have held this stair against ten,” I remarked, “ but what became of the corpulent? ”

“ They came out slim,” my guide replied; “ lower your head, there is an arch here.”

“ Does this go through to China? ” I asked cheerfully.

“ I’m free to confess that I don’t know where it goes,” he replied, with his usual composure.

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I halted; the wall beside me was streaked with dampness; shadowy spider webs festooned the arch.

“ This is delightful, my dear Gillette,” I said pleasantly; “ I appreciate the diversion, but why go on in ignorance? We may end in the bottom of a cistern.”

He chuckled, going on and carrying the light which I was compelled to follow.

“ There is dry ground just ahead,” he said, reassuringly, “ I was down twice to-day. Here we are now — it’s a corner of the wine cellar.” He held up his lamp and showed me the partition. “ That’s a blind, there’s a door in it, a sliding one — that opens into the cellar. But, coming down the usual way, by the stairs from Cartouche’s room, you see nothing extraordinary, and, until you make measurements, you do not suspect that a corner of the cellar is partitioned off.

“ And the stair from Cartouche’s room?”

Lavaur was holding the lamp and could not see my face in the shadow though he looked toward me.

“ You remember it?” he said; “ we came down with the police into the cellar

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on that morning when the house was examined; no one then suspected this wall; I didn't."

"Yes, I remember," I admitted musingly; "I remember that there was no door from this cellar, no way of leaving it except by the stair to Cartouche's room. It was easy therefore for Cartouche to go down this stair and through this door — and up here — so that he stood behind the cabinet, shielded by the curtain, and heard all. Lavour, the thing is a devilish invention — it will go a long way toward convicting the concierge, but — how on earth could that old man — feeble and rheumatic — make the trip in time to help me into my storm coat?"

"How long a time elapsed between the opening of the secret drawer and your departure?"

"That is not the point," I insisted sharply; "it was necessary for him to put the poison in the wine-glass, descend the stair and reach me in about five minutes — no more."

"Think — think carefully," said Lavour, "time slips when we talk; were you not a little while on the landing?"

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“ Make it seven minutes at the outside,” I said doggedly.

“ And yet,” remarked my companion, passing the lantern close to the partition, “ you can see the hinge and the spring lock on this side and both have been freshly cleaned and oiled.”

Of that there could be no doubt, and I began to experience a curious reversion of feeling. I had believed devoutly in the servants.

“ They must have both been in it,” I said; “ Marie must have put the poison in the wine.”

“ Marie is a very small person,” he replied, “ yet the man, or woman, who went up here was tall enough to knock away that piece of plaster on the arch — neither you nor I did it. It has not fallen, for it would be powdered here on the step; it fell on some one’s clothes and was dropped bit by bit higher up.”

“ Cartouche is short and stoops,” I said grimly, looking at him across the light.

He nodded.

“ I admit it,” he retorted, “ but there is no apparent way of getting in or out of this passage except through the cellar and

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from the cellar through Cartouche's room. He testified at the inquest that the door from his room on the cellar stairs was locked. Either he lied or he went up and down himself, or —— ”

“ Or there is another and a secret way out,” I remarked.

“ I have not found it,” he replied lightly, “ and I have looked — carefully and with tears.”

I looked about and saw no sign of an opening.

“ I should be sorry to *hang* Cartouche,” I said, “ although he is ready enough to accuse me.”

Lavour opened the door — a narrow one — and passed into the cellar. It was as I had seen it on the day after Lloyd's murder, a small square room intended chiefly as a storeroom in the old days and unused now, damp and dusty and forlorn. In the corner a flight of stairs ascended to the door of Cartouche's room. We went this way and Lavour called my attention to the fact that here neither hinge nor lock were oiled, but both creaked audibly enough.

“ These may have been purposely left in this condition,” he suggested.

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We were now in the little closet-like room where the old concierge had slept. It was untouched. There stood his narrow iron bedstead, the washstand, a chair and an old chest; a crucifix and a colored print of the madonna hung on the wall. Nothing could have been more simple or more significant of the life of the old man who lived there. Lavaur went on into the room beyond and setting the lamp on the table, took Cartouche's chair and I sat down opposite. We looked at each other for some moments in silence. It was the first to break it.

"My dear fellow," I said, "I am still obstinate; I don't believe it."

"Nor I," he replied smiling, "but the facts are strongly in support of the police theory; M. le Prefect would beam if he could see that stair this minute. But I don't mean that he shall—yet! What stupidity! Why didn't they look for the space between the walls?"

"I confess that I never thought of it," I said, "and I wonder if Lloyd did."

"He must have known it," replied Lavaur; "he was that sort of a man; but I doubt if he dreamed of such a use for it—in these times—it savors of the dark ages."

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One almost expects to look for old Benvenuto Cellini's ground diamond in the wine. You remember that Cellini's theory was that only ground diamond was fatal and that all the refined Italian poisoners used it."

I thought of the Italian cabinet.

"It is the ghost of Catharine de Medici," I said.

Lavaur began to search his pockets for a cigarette and I offered him a cigar.

"My dear fellow," I persisted, "it is not Cartouche. The whole thing hangs on the will; why should he change the will?"

"It involves the trifling sum of two millions more or less," he replied, "and it is possible that he was paid."

"Whom do you suspect?" I asked.

He laughed softly. "My dear Jack," he said pleasantly, "I have always thought you were the logical suspect."

"So does Lady Serena," I remarked.

"And Cartouche."

"Confound Cartouche!" I ejaculated testily.

"Or hang him," suggested my tormentor.

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“ You have a theory; out with it,” I said.

“ I have a theory, yes,” he admitted, “ but I confess it doesn’t hang together; it’s too flimsy. Give me time, Brinton; I am like a lawyer, I can consume more time doing nothing than any other species.”

“ And the woman with the red hat,” I said.

He rose and walked up and down the room.

“ She bought the poison,” he remarked, “ the paper was in Cartouche’s pocket. Yet, you and I do not believe in his guilt.”

“ We are threshing old straw.”

“ But we found the staircase.”

“ That is old too,” I retorted; “ Lavour, it’s the will — the will interests me; it’s a fraud.”

He took his seat again, knocking the ashes from his cigarette.

“ What color are her eyes? ” he asked genially.

“ I don’t know,” I replied shortly.

“ That’s interesting,” he pursued; “ you must present me.”

“ All this is nonsense, Lavour,” I said

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sharply; "the will is going to be contested and the clew lies here."

"Yes, the clew lies here," he replied musingly.

As he spoke the bell — an old-fashioned affair over our heads — jangled sharply.

He looked across at me with a peculiar smile.

"Brinton," he said, "I want you to play a rôle. That's Mrs. Buyse; I sent for her in your name, because she wouldn't come for me."

"The deuce!" I ejaculated, taken by surprise.

He grinned. "It's very simple," he said, "I only want to know something of the occupant of No. 24 rue Taitbout. You can question her."

"I might have had a little warning," I suggested.

But he had already gone to the door and let in Mrs. Buyse. She wore, as usual, a plain black dress and raised her veil as she responded to my greeting. Lavaur told her to sit down and retired to his corner with a slightly malicious twinkle to his eyes. She sat down primly on the edge of

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a chair and folded her hands in her lap, the very model of a decent upper servant.

“ You sent for me, sir,” she said, directing her looks toward me.

This was so palpably untrue that I winced.

“ I want to ask you a few questions, Mrs. Buyse,” I began lamely, “ about — about Henry Persifal.”

She gave me a quick look and drew her lips tightly together.

“ He was lodging — up to February sixth — at No. 24 rue Taitbout,” I went on, “ and we would like his present address.”

“ I do not know him,” she replied composedly; “ he was a friend of Luce Sapeurs, but I don’t think she knows his address.”

“ He is an American, I believe, Mrs. Buyse? ” struck in Lavaur.

She rubbed her hands softly together, looking down.

“ He is English, sir,” she said stiffly, “ but his mother was French.”

“ Indeed, how did you come to know that — of a stranger? ”

“ Luce told me,” she said, at once; “ I’ll ask her for the address, if you wish it, sir.”

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“ I wish it very much,” I replied, “ in fact, I would be willing to make it worth Mlle. Sapeurs’ while.”

She looked at me curiously. “ I hope there’s nothing amiss,” she remarked; “ that this has nothing to do with Dr. Lloyd’s death? ”

“ Nothing of a serious import,” Lavaur interposed; “ we want to make some inquiries, that’s all.”

“ Very good, sir,” she replied stiffly, and her glance at him was hostile. “ I’ll tell Luce.”

Not sure of Lavaur’s drift, I did not see my way to asking any more questions and the woman rose.

Then she stood hesitating, looking from one to the other.

“ I want to say,” she began and then stopped and seemed to collect her thoughts. “ I want to tell you gentlemen something that I haven’t told before. Every time I came here to see poor Dr. Lloyd — I was followed.”

“ Indeed, by whom? ” I asked, with some amusement, for she had not the face and figure to attract such attentions.

“ That’s what I don’t know, sir,” she

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replied, " but it's the first time that I was ever followed. He was a short man with a big coat — the collar turned up — and he wore a slouch hat. He'd follow me from two to three blocks, and always to this door or from it. He seemed to kind of hang around."

" Did you tell Dr. Lloyd? " I inquired.

" No, sir," she replied, " I didn't like to. It makes a decent woman feel ashamed. But, now that the poor gentleman is gone so strangely, I feel called upon to tell."

Lavaur asked her a few sharp questions about the man but she was unable to give us any clear description, and after a few more remarks he let her go. When the door closed behind her, he shrugged his shoulders.

" This might bear on the case," I suggested, " what do you think? "

" I think she lied," he retorted coolly.

CHAPTER XIV

A CABLEGRAM

The very day of Lady Serena's arrival in Paris, I received a package from home containing all the papers that bore directly, or indirectly, on the original draft of Lloyd's will. They had been forwarded to me by the senior partner in the firm of which I was a member, and I read my own notes with strange feelings. I had made no mistake in my recollections of the will. Anice Holland and Serena were to have had equal shares, Schenck received nothing, and the other bequests, mainly to charitable and literary purposes, were all larger than in the will found in the cabinet. I noticed especially that, in the old will, Anice had with her portion the farm whose boundary line had caused the long lawsuit with Portman. She was specifically heiress to the hundredth acre! I could not suppress a smile at the thought of the trouble that the poor girl would thus inherit, and then my mind recurred

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to Hez Portman and his threatening manner, and I could not solve the riddle of his hinted power over Schenck. However, I reflected that a man living at the pace that Schenck had from boyhood, must have more than one weak spot in his record, and doubtless it was some disgraceful fracas that Portman held over his head; but then such a weapon should have lost some of its edge by the death of Lloyd, for there was no one now who had either the wish or the authority to interfere with the culprit. Schenck was his own master, yet I could not but recall the sharp change in his face at the mention of Hez Portman. There was some secret cause to fear the old man's veiled threat, and had I had more time I should have been tempted to hunt for it there and then, and so should have found an earlier solution to many things, but other events marched too fast. I had begun to feel that it was only a matter of time before Cartouche's accusation of me would bring matters to a climax. But I regarded even this without much trepidation. It would be bad enough, humiliating enough, but there was far less of a case against me than against

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the concierge, and the secret stair was there to clench the accusation of the old man. Lavaur's restless curiosity, his relentless pursuit of one object, was enough to strike a chill to the culprit's heart — whoever he might be. Yet, I felt that we were really no nearer tracing him than when Lavaur first laid his restless hand on Dr. Lloyd's wine-glass.

It was while I reflected on these things that Mr. Gibbs' card came up. He represented Schenck and I fancied that he was also Mrs. Erckmann's private agent. I had not, by the way, yet seen that personage. I divined the lawyer's errand, but I sent for him to come up and received him in my room without formality.

Gibbs was a shrewd man in a small way, but he had no standing in the profession. I had learned this from private advices from home. He was plainly nervous when he came in and accepted a proffered chair by my window. I offered him a cigar, but he declined on the ground that he neither smoked nor drank.

"A high moral standard, Mr. Gibbs," I remarked, carefully putting away the papers that I had just been reviewing.

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“ Never did, sir,” he replied; “ I used to be superintendent of a Sunday school out in Michigan; had to toe the crack then, I can tell you.”

“ You were a shining example to the young, I see,” I remarked. “ It’s a good thing to live up to a principle; I congratulate you. But don’t you find the atmosphere of Paris very deteriorating? ”

He gave me a shrewd look as if he suspected me of a concealed gibe.

“ I confess I like it,” he said, with a broad smile; “ I was getting keyed too high.”

I could not suppress a smile. “ I am to understand that you are getting unkeyed? ” I suggested.

He laughed, leaning back in his chair and thrusting his thumbs into his armholes. He was assuming the cheerful air of a good comrade and I suspected that his proposition was to be soon forthcoming.

“ Mr. Brinton,” he said comfortably, “ I’ve been talking to my clients; they’re opposed to any long suit. There doesn’t seem to be any one in this fight to stay but Lady Bentinck. It’s going to be expensive, my dear sir, and futile. I came over to talk

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with you about the possibilities of a compromise. Your client —— ”

“ My clients,” I corrected.

“ You mean Lord Bentinck? ” he said, with a shrug; “ he’s scarcely a party to the suit.”

“ I refer to Miss Holland.”

He stared.

“ Mrs. Erckmann gave me to understand that I was retained,” he said bluntly.

“ Miss Holland and I had a personal conversation in regard to it,” I replied, “ and she is in sympathy with her cousin, Lady Serena Bentinck.”

“ It seems I have been misinformed,” he said stiffly, turning red.

I nodded; looking out of the window I had seen a victoria stopping before the hotel and Lady Serena and her husband were in it. They left a note and drove off; I knew I was summoned. Gibbs could not quite recover from his astonishment.

“ At least, I represent Mr. Schenck,” he said, “ and he’s prepared to fight every inch of the way.”

“ Precisely,” I said, “ if he can’t compromise.”

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“ You’ll find yourself on the losing side,” said Gibbs, with acrimony.

“ I am a philosopher in that respect,” I retorted, taking Lady Serena’s note from the bell-boy; “ I’ve been there before.”

“ Mr. Schenck has a kindly feeling for his cousins,” pursued Mr. Gibbs obstinately, “ and he is willing to make quite liberal terms. It’s your opportunity, Mr. Brinton.”

“ I appreciate it,” I retorted, “ but we haven’t even begun yet, Mr. Gibbs; we have something in reserve; we may surprise you.”

He smiled incredulously and rose, seeing that I was inclined to cut short the interview.

“ We’ve accomplished nothing, Mr. Brinton,” he said.

“ The law is slow,” I retorted.

“ It is also costly,” he remarked meaningly.

“ To him who loses,” I said.

“ Exactly,” he replied, and went out, a little red in the face.

Then I opened Lady Serena’s note. It was simply a request that I should come around to a five o’clock tea at Meurice’s.

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Meanwhile I had sent a letter to the Prefect of Police asking him to send me an expert detective. It was in reply to this note that M. Delcasse and I became acquainted. He was a quiet man of middle age, his hair very gray on the temples, his manners and dress those of a gentleman. I took him fully into my confidence and told him that I was as liable to accusation as Cartouche and indeed, I did not know why I had not been accused.

He listened with a peculiar smile.

"I can tell monsieur," he said courteously; "M. le Prefect always strongly suspected you, but M. Lavaur has used every means at hand—even the influence of the American Ambassador to protect you. Besides, the poison envelope on Cartouche did much to convict him."

"And all this time I have been really a suspect," I said, laughing a little at my own stupidity.

He smiled, waving his hands with a deprecating gesture.

"Monsieur has said it."

Then I told him all that had been accomplished; even the small details which did not seem to me vital, and asked him to

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obtain at once some information about the man Henry Persifal.

After this, I made my way by five o'clock to Lady Serena's quarters. I expected to meet Lord Bentinck and was surprised to be ushered into a purely feminine tea-party. Lady Serena was nibbling bon-bons and talking to a young girl who sat beside her at the tea table. They both turned as I entered and I saw a charming face under a big black hat with plumes. It was Anice Holland. I smiled involuntarily, remembering Lady Serena's anticipations of this unknown cousin. Lady Bentinck held out a bejewelled hand.

"I'm awfully glad to see you," she said, "Tommy's out; we wanted to talk to you ourselves. Isn't it delightful that she isn't hopeless — a person, in fact?" as she said this, she waved at Anice who was smiling at me across the samovar.

"I'm rather sorry I didn't witness the first meeting," I replied, taking the chair that Lady Serena indicated.

"She expected a country bumpkin," said Anice; "I'm not sure that she wasn't disappointed."

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“ I was — in a way,” said Serena, with great complacence; “ I wanted to find fault with her and I can’t. She’s even going to join issues with me, although her aunt is heart and soul for that dear creature, Andy.”

“ Perverted taste,” I replied; “ I have just seen his lawyer Gibbs. He claimed to be yours, Miss Holland.”

“ What presumption!” she exclaimed, “ I detest him, but Aunt Erckmann has talked to him a good deal.”

“ Have you got the draft of the will yet, Jack?” interposed Serena, putting lemon into my tea.

“ I hate that,” I remarked cheerfully; “ I’m a cream and sugar man.”

“ I wish you could answer seriously,” said her ladyship indignant; “ you’re as bad as a woman.”

“ What do you want to know?” I asked, maliciously.

“ All about the will,” she said.

“ I have the notes in my pocket,” I replied.

“ Good gracious!” ejaculated Miss Holland.

I looked up and saw that she was not

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heeding me but had her eyes fixed on the door opposite.

It had opened to admit a servant who brought some letters, and I was surprised to recognize the decent black clad figure.

“ Why it’s old Leah Buyse! ” exclaimed Anice, as the woman withdrew, “ how in the world ——? ”

“ She’s come to help me, ” explained Serena; “ she’s an old lemon, of course, but what could I do? I had no sooner got here than Shane was taken ill. She’s been sent to the hospital, poor soul! This woman was here to see me and I simply took her at once; I’m a helpless creature and couldn’t get on. ”

“ But how did she come here at all? ” asked Miss Holland.

“ Oh, she came with those vulgar rich McHenryrs and they shipped her; she’s awfully behind the times, you know. She was adrift and needed help — and I took her. ”

Anice Holland laughed mischievously.

“ I remember when she used to give me medicine in jam, ” she said; “ I think the whole family employed that woman. I never could like her because she loved Andy Schenck; besides, she never gave me

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enough jam to sweeten the bitter taste."

"She's worried to death now over Uncle Lloyd's death," said Serena; "she came to me in tears because John Brinton and Lavour had catechized her like a criminal. Why didn't you wait for me, Jack? Men have no tact."

Anice looked across at me with a queer little smile.

"Can't we see the notes about Uncle Lloyd's will?" she asked softly, blushing a little as she met my eyes.

I took out my papers and went through them carefully. Serena needed explanations; her cousin, on the other hand, was quick and clear sighted. When I was through, Lady Bentinck clasped her hands and looked at me with melancholy regret.

"Dear me," she murmured, "I should have been able to pay my milliner's bill and to fix up Tommy's old rookeries. It's almost too much that there should be such a mess after that!"

Anice Holland felt it more than she did. Doubtless the change in her life would have been great; she turned a little pale.

"How generous he meant to be to me!" she exclaimed, with a sigh; "and I've had

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hard thoughts of him sometimes as miserly. I'm overwhelmed with self reproach."

"Pshaw, you didn't get it!" flashed back Lady Serena, with a pout.

"No," admitted Anice, with a rueful smile, "but he intended it; I'm sure now that the other will is a fraud."

"Oh, of course it is," said Serena; "but, dear, dear, we shall have an endless lawsuit and I hate them."

As she spoke the door opened and a short stout woman, with a florid face and reddish hair, came in. Lady Serena gave me a quick, significant glance as she rose to greet her abrupt visitor.

"Mrs. Ereckmann let me present Mr. Brinton," she said.

Mrs. Ereckmann greeted us both coldly and fastened her eyes on her niece.

"I'm sorry to interrupt your tea party," she said, rather sharply, "but I've been waiting for Anice for an hour. You know we're going to see some pictures."

"It's so late, aunt," suggested Anice, rising with reluctance; "I should so much rather see them by daylight."

"Stay and drink tea with me, Mrs. Ereckmann," said Serena sweetly.

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“ Thank you, but I think we must go,” she replied stiffly; “ we’re twenty minutes late now.”

Miss Holland rose with some embarrassment at her aunt’s discourtesy, but Lady Serena bade her an affectionate adieu.

“ I shall see you tomorrow,” she said, nodding her head cheerfully and smiling as if she had no eyes for Mrs. Erckmann’s angry face.

Anice gave me her hand but her aunt scarcely noticed me bustling out ahead of her.

When they were gone Lady Serena sank back in her chair with a merry laugh.

“ I shall be the death of that woman yet,” she said; “ she is crazy after money and she wants to force Anice to marry Schenck, and to force me to be content with my pittance. She regards us as conspirators, John.”

“ We are rather, aren’t we? ” said I; “ and Schenck told me that he intended to marry Miss Holland.”

“ Goodness, I hope he has his divorce,” she retorted; “ but Anice has refused him and that is the cause of the aunt’s wrath.”

“ What impertinence for that brute to

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ask a young girl like that!" I said wrathfully; "and why does Mrs. Erckmann favor it? If the will is broken the law would only give him a share, and the old will gives him nothing. She is very imprudent."

Serena shrugged her shoulders.

"She's an old goose," she said, "and I believe she's borrowed money of Schenk."

"To come here?" I asked quickly.

Serena nodded, smiling mischievously.

"I've no business to say so," she declared; "Bentinck says that my tongue is sure to cut my throat, but, dear me, what is the use of silence?"

"Why do you think that she borrowed of Schenk?" I persisted, beginning to see the reason for many things.

"I divined it," she replied lightly; "I know they're poor and they're here in style. Of course, they borrowed of some one, and I think they borrowed of him. Mrs. Erckmann wouldn't be so eager to please him; besides, he has the proprietary air."

"Confound him!" I said bluntly.

She laughed and looked at me with roguish eyes.

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“ I should like you for a cousin,” she said.

I was conscious of turning brutally red.

“ My dear Lady Serena, I should be called a fortune hunter.”

“ Pshaw! ” she retorted lightly, “ how absurd. That’s what they called Tommy and he isn’t. He was really quite foolish about me. Of course, it was a good thing that I had ‘ prospects.’ Go in and win, John; when she has the money suitors will swarm; now’s your time. I’m ready to volunteer my good offices.”

I set down my tea-cup and looked for my hat.

“ Not another word,” I protested, “ you’ll make a fool of me yet — between you.”

When I reached my own quarters I found another package of letters from home and among them the report of the detective employed to meet the Red Star liner.

“ Mrs. Mattisby ” had arrived in due time and evaded an interview and been spirited away by Mr. Jepson, the attorney for old Hez Portman. The detective asked for instructions; if she was wanted on the charge of murder, he would hunt her down,

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if not — what was he to do? Mr. Jepson had met her and whisked her off and refused to furnish any information in regard to her.

I laid down the report in some amazement. Here was a new development; what was the key to Portman's threats and his interference? I set out at once to find Lavaur.

CHAPTER XV

A MORNING WALK.

I did not find Lavaur until the next morning and then he was preparing an early lunch in Dr. Lloyd's quarters. The fellow had no nerves and seemed to regard the gruesome associations of the place as a bit of an appetizer. He had made his own coffee and was cooking lambs' kidneys in a chafing-dish. He wore his flannel trousers and a smoking jacket and his hair was on end. The whole place was in a litter of artistic disorder and he was happy.

"Just in time, Jack," he said, "for a kidney. Sit down, I'm a bit of a cook. I was out for a lark last night but I found your scribble under the door. What's up?"

I handed him the report and he read it in a leisurely fashion, after he had blown out the light under the chafing-dish. As he read, his keen face lighted up with enjoyment.

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“ Really, Brinton, this is delightful,” he said cheerfully; “ it grows interesting. We’ll add Mr. Portman to the list of suspects.”

“ He is crazed on the subject of the hundredth acre,” I remarked, “ although I cannot quite understand it in a hard-headed man like that. He is anxious to compromise and get that acre; I believe he’d rather lose twice its value than that bit of disputed dirt.”

“ When does the case come up? ” asked Lavour.

“ It was to have been called at the spring term of the court and appealed to the Supreme Court; that would mean a delay of from three to five years if it got on the docket. He wants to prevent that, to make terms with the heirs. But, you see, when Schenck files that will for probate in Boston, we shall file a *caveat* to prevent his proving it and taking out letters of administration. Then will follow a long and hot legal contest. I suppose old Hez is nearly distracted, but this last move is more than I can comprehend. It is not on the cards to suppose him a murderer.”

Lavour chuckled comfortably. “ My

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dear Brinton," he said, "you have been shadowed ever since Lloyd's death, why not Portman?"

"To be sure, why not?" I retorted; "for one thing, I don't believe he's capable of anything so complicated and neat as this; and for another, I'm tired of suspecting everybody. But we'll have to put the matter in the hands of the Prefect of Police for we must have the woman with the red hat, and have her on the accusation of aiding and abetting the murderer."

Lavour nodded, replenishing his plate.

"That's the first move," he said, "and then I have another. Are you to be at liberty tonight?"

I hesitated a moment, for I had intended calling on Anice Holland and her aunt.

"You can call on her tomorrow," said Lavour, with a grin.

"My dear fellow, I believe you're the devil!" I exclaimed; "but I'll be at your disposal tonight."

"Good boy," he said comfortably; "then I'll write two notes and we'll have a little pleasant reunion — Schenck and Portman."

"That's not a bad idea," I replied dry-

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ly, "but how do you propose to get them?"

"Leave that to me, my dear Jack," he said; "I'm thinking of adding Gibbs, only he's such a pawn in the game."

"An undesirable pawn," I replied, "for he might hold Schenck in check. Andrew has such a bad temper that — unguided — we may be able to draw him out. No, no, leave out all lawyers but your humble servant."

"The legal profession loves a monopoly," remarked Lavour, and then added that we must see to it at once that the mysterious woman was secured.

I wrote the cablegram to the New York detective while I was there, and he volunteered to see the Prefect of Police at once and divulge to him our discoveries in regard to the poison envelope that we had hitherto kept to ourselves. The strongest circumstantial evidence still pointed to Cartouche, but there were now equally strong indications of a conspiracy — and a conspiracy in which Hez Portman had some part. I had never seen Lavour in a better humor; the developments of the case seemed to delight him.

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“ My dear fellow,” he said, “ it’s a conspiracy. When we find the clew we shall solve the riddle of the will — and Miss Holland will come to her own. By the way, I have seen her and I admire your taste, but Schenck is decidedly the *parti* with Mrs. Erckmann.”

“ Exactly,” I replied, “ and neither of us stands a chance with the niece.”

“ Nonsense, what modesty!” retorted Lavour, with a shrug, “ it is true that your hair is nearly red and your features beautifully irregular, but you are a lady’s man, Jack; they all like you.”

These personalities were not at all to my taste, so I rose.

“ I’ll be around by eight o’clock,” I said coldly.

He looked at me with twinkling eyes. “ It has really gone as far as that then?” he said maliciously, “ ’tis no longer a joke. *À la bonne heure*, there is the young lady now — walking by the house and regarding it with interest. Hang this smoking jacket and this dishevelment! Feminine curiosity has drawn her half across Paris alone; she’ll be followed by some of my dear fel-

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low citizens. Here — I say — Jack! — come back here — you —— ”

But I was gone. I made my way down stairs and out the door with more rapidity than grace. And there, a few yards ahead, was a slender figure in a smart tailor-made suit and the big hat with black plumes. She had a bearing and style that was astonishing in a little slip of a girl from the country.

She was startled and colored when I overtook her.

“ Yes, ” she confessed, “ I came way off here — ostensibly to the church — Notre Dame de Lorette — but really to see the house. It seems like morbid curiosity, doesn't it? Yet, I do not think it is. I wanted to see it — to fancy my uncle's life there. He has always been quite a figure in my horizon, from the days when I used to go to Boston — at rare intervals — to call on him in solemn state and receive my new five dollar gold piece. That was an enormous sum to me. I remember I went usually once a year and I lived on that expectation and laid out that money all the other three hundred and sixty-four days.

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I felt myself as rich as Hetty Green — before it was spent! I think I know every piece of old furniture in that old house on Beacon Street, from the clock in the hall — with the sun and moon on its face — to the mahogany wine-cooler in the dining-room, where he kept his favorite bottle of port at just the right temperature until it was served. Yet, he wrote Aunt Erckmann this year that he scarcely recollected me! ”

“ That was enormously his loss, ” I said, “ and he died without the chance to retrieve it. If your memory is so good, perhaps, you can recall some other things, among them my occasional presence at your uncle’s house when you were there. ”

She looked at me with mischievous eyes.

“ I do, ” she said demurely; “ I remember you when your hair was quite red and you wore turn down collars. ”

“ Ye gods! ” I exclaimed miserably, “ why did I rush upon my fate? ”

“ Do you remember buying me some soda water and some taffy? ” she pursued relentlessly. “ I remember it very well, and I almost forgave you for having red hair. ”

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“ You evidently disliked it,” I said feebly.

“ I did,” she retorted, with composure, “ but time changes everything.”

“ You mean it has altered your feelings? ” I suggested, with a wild attempt at gayety.

“ No,” she said, with a twinkle, “ but it has changed your hair.”

“ Is the color more to your taste? ” I asked mildly, “ because if not — there are barber shops. While there is life there is hope — and hair dye.”

She looked at me thoughtfully. “ Don’t,” she advised, “ it is never becoming; besides it turns purple in streaks. And you would spoil my reminiscences.”

“ You must forgive me,” I said, “ but when two people have referred in rapid succession to the color of your hair, you grow sensitive.”

“ Two? ” she queried, with elevated brows; “ who else was so heartless and so rude? I really am ashamed of myself! ”

“ The other was Lavour, Gillette Lavour, who is living in Dr. Lloyd’s house yonder.”

“ Oh, is he really? ” she cried, with interest, “ so I was told. We met him — my

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aunt and I—last night with Lord Bentinck. I thought him most interesting. Is he really trying to solve the dreadful mystery? ”

“ Really,— and really,” I replied, “ and I suppose he is vastly more interesting to you than if he had red hair.”

She looked at me smiling.

“ I think he might be more so.”

“ In what way, madam? ” stiffly, but with some internal eagerness.

“ With red hair,” she said maliciously and laughed, as merrily as a child.

“ Thank you,” I murmured; “ if this keeps on I shall cease wishing to be bald.”

Instead of walking toward the heart of Paris, where our hotels lay, we had been walking back toward the Church of Notre Dame de Lorette and were now under its shadow. As we turned the corner of the *parvis* she made a little exclamation and faced about.

“ Good gracious! ” she said, half laughing, “ there is my cousin Andrew, and I don’t want to meet him.”

It was Schenck, and he was not twenty paces from us. It was a windy morning and it had been raining and he wore his

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storm coat, a rather loud plaid, for the fellow never had good taste. He had seen us almost at once and hesitated, as if he had two minds about stopping us, but Anice's manner checked him. His face flushed darkly and he saluted us, flashing an irate look at me. When he was past, she began to laugh softly.

"What a narrow escape," she murmured; "you frightened him away — for I am sure Aunt Erckmann sent him after me."

"Why does your aunt insist on taking his side?" I asked. "It is against your true interests."

"She does not think so," she replied, coloring highly; "she has a perfect terror of lengthy lawsuits and — and ——"

"And lawyers' fees," I suggested, smiling.

She laughed. "Is it second sight with you?" she asked.

"I fancied it. But don't be afraid of too long a suit," I added; "I think we shall find a way."

"Has anything been discovered?" she asked quickly.

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“ Don’t ask me,” I replied, “ but believe me; I shall do my best for you.”

She was no longer merry; her face paled a little and she looked at me earnestly.

“ Oh, don’t let it be long,” she said, “ don’t. It means so much. I’d rather take the smaller sum. It’s weak, it’s childish, but I — I — ” she stammered, “ I’m really almost afraid of the man! ”

“ Of Schenck? ”

She nodded, looking at me and trying to smile.

“ Put it out of your thoughts,” I said, very wrathful at Mrs. Erckmann and suspecting much; “ he shall not annoy you. Can’t you trust me? ”

She blushed softly and held out her hand.

“ It’s a compact,” I said, as I clasped it and she smiled.

“ It seems so sordid,” she said, “ but it really isn’t that! ”

“ I could not think that of you,” I said lightly. “ Hadn’t we better go in and look at the church — in case we should meet Schenck if we went on at once? ”

“ Do you think we should? ” she hesitated.

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“ I am sure of it,” I replied firmly, and it took us just an hour to examine the frescoes and the chancel, and she had remembered a hundred things about old times before we recollected that it was long past noon and there was such a thing as lunch and an irate aunt.

CHAPTER XVI

AN INTERESTING MEETING

That evening, Lavour and I sat together over the fire in Dr. Lloyd's study waiting for our two visitors. He had seen the Prefect of Police and steps had already been taken toward securing the return of the mysterious purchaser of the poison. Further than that little had developed; I had not seen the French detective, Delcasse, nor had I received a report from him. The man, Henry Persifal, seemed to be even more elusive than the woman with the red hat.

It was the first of March and the wind howled about the old house and rattled the casements. Nothing could have been more dreary than the wailing sound in the turret where every gale seemed to wake an echo. As usual, Lavour smoked, his feet on the fender and the fire-light playing fitfully on his keen face; in the half shadow he looked older than he really was. He turned suddenly and caught my eyes on his face.

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“ Well? ” he said quizzically.

“ I was wondering what in the world caused your interest in this case, ” I remarked. “ I can't see the reason. ”

He smiled.

“ My dear Jack, ” he said, “ I am a person of whims. For my part, I was thinking that only one theory gains strength; so far, Cartouche is guilty — the apparent instrument of a conspiracy —— ”

“ Why settle on that poor old man? ” I asked, with a shrug.

Lavour laughed grimly. “ You evidently don't know that I caused his arrest, ” he remarked.

“ And why? You don't believe in his guilt? ”

“ My dear fellow, I had to do it, ” he explained, “ it was either he or you, and naturally he was anxious that it should be you. ”

“ Poor devil, ” I remarked, “ I can't blame him. After all, Lavour, you were clever to manage it. Logically, I am the man — but the man without a motive, for I gained nothing. ”

“ Neither did Cartouche — unless he was paid. ”

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“ His legacy would be great to him,” I said, thoughtfully. “ May I ask you what you propose to do with these two men tonight? ”

He looked at me with an enigmatical smile.

“ My dear boy,” he said, “ this is my game of chess. A knight and a castle will be here tonight and I propose to make a few moves.”

“ I suppose from his bulk, Portman is the castle,” I retorted, with a shrug, “ but please don’t call Andy a knight.”

He laughed and stirred the fire. “ Should you prefer to make him a pawn? ”

“ Of the meanest pattern, yes.”

“ I’ll let it go at that,” he said, “ for even a pawn has a place in the game, and Schenck plays a rather large rôle just now, especially, if he takes the bank.”

“ Which he will not!” I retorted sharply.

Lavour chuckled softly to himself. “ Don’t get excited,” he said, “ nothing is more uncertain than the law. Besides, where is your precious lost will anyway? ”

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“ Ah,” I exclaimed, “ wouldn’t I give a round sum to see it! ”

As I spoke the bell rang and Lavaur held up his hand with a smile.

“ Enter first gentleman,” he said, dramatically; “ now you will see my plot unfold.”

Yet, it was I who hit upon a plan of action which forced a strange issue to the interview. I thought of it while he was going down stairs to admit the earliest visitor, and I smiled inwardly at the idea of surprising my astute friend, of springing the trap without warning. He liked to mystify me; well and good, I should act with independence and, perhaps, surprise him. I threw another log upon the fire-irons and listened to the voices below. It was easy to recognize the first arrival; the tones were gruff and somewhat coarse, but with a breezy note of alertness. It was Portman; Schenck spoke low, and in a thin voice with the nasal burr. This arrival fell in exactly with my plans and I rejoiced. They came up stairs together, Lavaur stepping lightly and swiftly, Portman laboring heavily and making the stairs creak. He was short of breath and flushed

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when he entered the upper room and his resemblance to a bulldog seemed peculiarly emphatic. He greeted me curtly and took the chair that his host offered, on the opposite side of the fire. As he did so, he stared around the room in open curiosity and with some contempt, I thought, of the arrangements which were, doubtless, meaningless to him.

“ So, these are Lloyd’s quarters? ” he remarked. “ I should think so. Full of gim-cracks and what-nots. Haven’t the heirs laid any claim to ’em? Not that I should think they’d want ’em — by a long sight! Wouldn’t bring anything at auction up to home.”

Lavaur grinned irrepressibly. “ They’re to stay here for a while, by general consent of the heirs,” he explained; “ then there will have to be an accounting, of course — after the suit is over.”

Portman brought his shaggy brows down over his alert eyes and scowled at us.

“ I had no sympathy for Hen Lloyd alive,” he said, “ and I don’t allow that I have much more now he’s dead, but I be darned if I haven’t better feelings about it than his heirs. It’s always the way; soon

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as a fellow is dead the kin set on to pick the bones — ain't any better than beasts. What did you want of me?" he added abruptly, turning full on us.

"We want the woman that your lawyer, Mr. Jepson, has spirited off the Red Star liner, 'City of New York,'" I retorted calmly.

Lavaur stared and so did Portman.

"Well, I'm darned!" the latter ejaculated.

"Mr. Portman," I said deliberately, "Dr. Lloyd was poisoned; the paper which contained the poison was found on the person of Cartouche, the concierge, who — by the way — denies all knowledge of the crime — which he would naturally do in any case. This poison was traced by the envelope, and it was found that it had been purchased in London by a woman. She was also traced, described and located in England; then she was lost sight of, found again, tracked to the Red Star liner which sailed for New York. There she was met and spirited away by your attorney and confidential man of affairs, Noah Jepson. She's wanted as an accomplice of the murderer."

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Portman had been listening to me with a very strange expression on his pugnacious face and as I concluded he let his hand fall heavily, slapping his knee.

“By George!” he cried, with open satisfaction, “that’s good news. I’m obliged to you, my dear sir, though I know you didn’t intend to accommodate me.”

It was my turn to stare somewhat blankly, but I pulled myself together and tried to force him into close quarters.

“You, of course, understand that we want the woman pretty badly over here,” I remarked sternly, “that we are determined to have her, and to probe this matter to the bottom — without fear or favor — requisition papers will be issued.”

He began to laugh at that, his face flushing deeply.

“No need of that, sir,” he said, with evident enjoyment; “she’s on her way — this minute,” and he put his hand in his pocket.

“You mean she took the next ship back?” asked Lavour, with a maliciously amused glance at me — he hardly suppressed a laugh.

Portman found a cablegram that had

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been crumbled in his vest pocket, smoothed it out and handed it to me with a grim smile. It was brief and I read it aloud.

“ ‘ Met woman at the steamer. Sent her back by the Burgoyne; due at Havre, March 8th. Am shadowed, Jepson.’ ”

Lavaur and I exchanged glances in which we tried to conceal our mortification, while our opponent lay back in his chair and laughed wickedly — perfectly aware that we were nonplussed.

“ She’ll be here,” he said, “ but mark you, gentlemen, she’ll be my witness — not yours. My witness every time — and never yours.”

“ She will be in the hands of the police,” I remarked, trying to recover my mental equilibrium. So far this burly old man had been more than a match for us.

He showed his teeth now, strong and short ones, in a peculiar smile, a smile that was very irritating.

“ Even so, she’ll be my witness,” he said flatly. “ By the Lord Harry, do you think I’m such a cussed fool as to play into your hands? ”

“ Let me warn you, Mr. Portman, not to

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boast even here of suborning a witness," I interposed suavely.

"You're a mighty smart man — in your own estimation," he retorted sarcastically, "but I reckon I can show you some pointers even at law."

At this Lavaur giggled disgracefully and fell to poking the fire. Portman stared at him with a baleful light in his fierce eyes, his brows down, but there was something like a grim smile lurking about his lips. Then he turned on me again.

"How deep are you in with Schenck?" he snapped.

I gave him a look that measured him slowly from top to toe. As I did so the bell rang.

"Mr. Schenck will set your mind at rest on that score," I said, contemptuously.

"So ho! He's coming, is he?" he exclaimed, and gave utterance to a low malicious chuckle. "Well, I'm darned if I don't clap it down on him now!"

Lavaur went down and let Schenck in and they entered the room together. Andy was evidently in courting attire; he wore a new tuxedo suit and white tie and his hair was freshly cut. He reminded me

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somewhat forcibly of a shaved pig. At the sight of Portman he came to a halt and flushed up to the short cropped bristles on his forehead. He was as plainly disgruntled as his opponent was pleased. The old man lost no time in coming to the point. He was blunt and obstinate.

“Hello, Andy!” he said, familiarly, “you’re dressing up to your prospects, eh? How about the divorce? Did the court let you off with a little alimony?”

Schenck stared at him. “I didn’t come here to see you,” he said, sullenly; “and I’m not here to answer impertinent questions.”

Portman grinned. “Look here,” he said brusquely, “you can’t play the high hand with me, Andy Schenck! If you’re to get that property you want me on your side, I can tell you that! And the way’s plain. Compromise that suit on the hundredth acre and, by the Lord Harry, we’ll beat these two sharpers here—out of hand.”

“Thank you,” said Lavour placidly.

But neither of them heeded us, though I think Schenck’s reply was framed entirely on our account.

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“ I don’t catch your meaning, Mr. Portman,” he said, stiffly, “ and you might as well understand — here and now — that I have no thought of a compromise. I’ll not give you an inch — not a d—d inch.”

Portman glared at him, strongly moved.

“ You say that — that to my face? ” he sputtered, “ you dare to, you sneak! Very well — we shall see. A week hence, Mr. Schenck, there’ll be another tune to your song.”

But Andrew had lost his temper. “ You get nothing,” he said hoarsely, “ not an inch — I be d—d if you do! ” but his tone faltered a little as he said it, he had encountered the old man’s look.

Hez leaned forward, his red hands gripping his knees, his fiery eyes fastened on Andrew with threatening belligerence.

“ I tell you what it is, Schenck,” he thundered wrathfully, “ if you don’t drop to our terms and give up that whole line — and the hundredth acre — I’ll give the other side a piece of information that’ll take the wind out of your sails. I’ll ruin you, sir.”

Schenck had taken a chair opposite and he sat looking down at the floor. His face

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blanched and there was a nervous twitching about the thick lips.

Lavour leaned forward and lighted another cigarette, tossing the match into the fire.

“ And if I accede to your terms, Mr. Portman? ” said Schenck slowly and angrily, as though the words were dragged from him; “ if I should yield now — at once — and make you a pledge, what then? ”

“ Well, I’m darned if I know whether I’d believe you or not! ” replied the old man, with a grim laugh of scorn.

Andrew shot a venomous look at him. “ It would be in writing, of course, ” he said, in a low voice.

Old Portman’s fierce attitude relaxed, his eyes kindled with the anticipation of triumph. It was not difficult to foresee his answer. It was then that I interposed.

“ Mr. Schenck, ” I said quietly, “ if you attempt any compromise, involving the estate before the will is even brought to probate, I’ll serve an injunction on you. You don’t own the property. ”

Schenck turned on me, white with fury.

“ Curse you! ” he said, “ why do you

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drive me into a corner? By heaven, it's you who stand in peril of indictment; it's you who should be in jail instead of Car-touche."

I bowed my acknowledgments and turned to Portman.

"Mr. Portman," I said, "my clients will give you fair terms for any valuable light upon this case."

He twisted his face into a wry smile; his eyes were malicious.

"The hundredth acre," he said doggedly; "that's my price."

Schenck sprang from his chair with an oath.

"It's a conspiracy," he said; "you're dickering for my ruin. I'll have you all indicted!"

"Pshaw!" interposed Lavour coolly, "you've been drinking, Schenck."

"I'm as sober as you are," he shouted, "and you're nothing but conspirators. I'll not stay here a moment," and he rose and stalked to the door. There, he let us have it over his shoulder. "I'll see to it, you'll be indicted," he said, and then staring viciously at me: "it's easy to see who murdered my precious uncle! You must

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have been mighty disappointed that Miss Holland didn't get more, but I be d—d if you get her — or her portion!" and with this delicate challenge, he flung himself out.

Portman was on his feet at the same moment.

"I'll bid you good evening, gentlemen," he said, with a malicious chuckle; "it's my opinion that I'll buy that young cub, but if I don't, I'll consider your terms. But my price is set."

"He can make no legal agreement," I retorted; "I wish you good luck — with the hundredth acre."

He stood a moment looking at me with a queer smile.

"By the Lord Harry," he began, and broke off, laughing, and laughed all the way down stairs and was still laughing when he slammed the front door behind him.

There was something almost gruesome in his harsh mirth, his coarsely suggested triumph, and Lavaur and I sat staring at each other with a keen sense of our own insignificance as even pawns in the recent moves. He was the first to laugh — rather

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ruefully it is true — and to shrug his shoulders.

“ It didn't come off strictly as scheduled,” he remarked, at last, “ and —— ”

But he was interrupted by a sharp rapping apparently on the wall behind my head. I confess that I started and Lavaur sprang from his chair.

“ A séance — not on the cards,” I suggested, with sarcasm.

Tap, tap!

We were not mistaken; it came from the wall behind the Italian cabinet.

“ The secret staircase! ” exclaimed Lavaur gleefully.

I caught up the lamp and held it while he began to fumble for the spring, but failed at first to find it.

CHAPTER XVII

THE TUNNEL

In his excitement Lavaur was clumsy, and it was some moments before he had his finger on the spring and the sliding panel slowly receded. I held my lamp high and the light fell full on the figure of a man standing in the narrow space between the turret and the secret staircase. At first glance, I did not recognize him, but Lavaur had evidently expected him.

“ Hello! ” he said, “ I was right after all! ”

“ Monsieur was right in every particular, ” replied a voice that I began to recognize, and our visitor taking off his hat, revealed the gray head and keen featured face of the detective, M. Delcasse. At the same moment he closed the slide of the dark lantern he held in his hand and stepped out into the room.

“ You must pardon me, messieurs, ” he said politely, “ I am covered with dust and

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dirt, but I could not forbear announcing my success."

Lavour clapped his hands softly, apparently overcome with delight.

"Where was the trap?" he cried.

"If monsieur will permit me — one moment," Delcasse fumbled in his pocket and drew out a large sheet of paper on which there was some kind of a drawing. "A pencil, M. Lavour; ah, thanks, I will draw the design in a moment; it is necessary to make myself understood."

He sat down at the table, spreading out his papers, and Lavour and I drew up our chairs.

"May I ask how long you have been burrowing?" I said mildly.

He smiled, elevating his brows a little.

"The better part of two days, m'sieur, and all this evening."

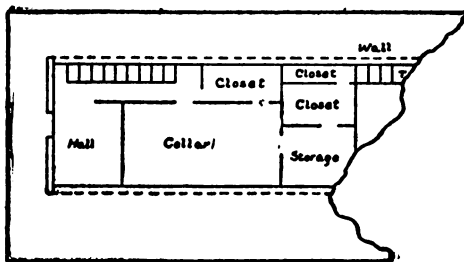
I grunted. Here was devotion to duty; the man's clothes were powdered with dust and dirt and streaked with mould, and his fingers were as red with rust as those of the immortal Jerry Cruncher. Lavour was watching him with eager interest.

M. Delcasse produced the same slip of paper that Lavour had extracted from the

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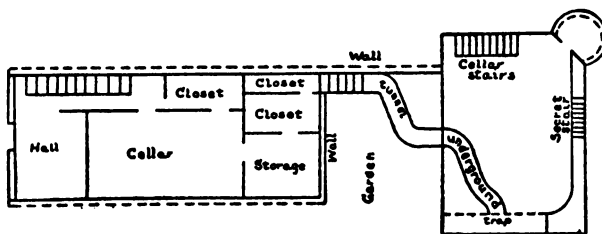
bureau drawer at No. 24 rue Taitbout.

“Here is your drawing, monsieur,” he said, “and now I will complete it,” and he held it on another piece of paper and commenced to outline rapidly.



The torn plan from the rue Taitbout.

After a few moments, during which we both watched him earnestly, he pushed over the larger sheet.



M. Delcasse's drawing.

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“ That, messieurs, is, in rough, the outline of the tunnel from this house, on the rue Fontaine St. Georges, to the house on the rue Taitbout. It is, as m’sieur will perceive, almost exactly in the line that he indicated, and the reason that you could not find the opening on this side was that it was securely fastened underneath with bolts that have been oiled within six weeks or so, and are of a modern pattern. The tunnel — or cellar — is old; the remains of the old, old plan of these houses in the time when men escaped by secret stairs, through cellars and through traps.”

“ In short then, M. Delcasse, this house is entered from No. 24 rue Taitbout? ” I said sharply, “ and Henry Persifal — the mysterious and elusive Henry — is probably the man who oiled those bolts and entered here? ”

M. Delcasse smiled. “ Possibly, monsieur,” he said, “ that is one of the deductions, but it is by no means certain. Yet the drawing that M. Lavaur discovered in his bureau drawer would seem to support that theory.”

“ I am to understand that this search was concerted between you and my friend

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here without my knowledge? ” I continued.

Lavaur laughed good humoredly. “ Pardon me, Brinton,” he said, “ I wanted to be sure, before I confessed my suspicions, and I got M. Delcasse to take those rooms on the rue Taitbout and he has been searching there. You see, this fragment of a plan gave the cellars of that house, No. 24; the plan was apparently correct in every particular but one; we could not find that entrance to the tunnel. It was masked there as the staircase is here. How did you find it, Delcasse? ”

The detective smiled. “ You remember, m’sieur, that I applied for those two cellar closets for storage for some barrels of papers belonging to my grandfather — a newspaper man of note in Provence? Precisely; I was a long time in getting those barrels arranged and in preparing to sort the papers. I was encouraged because my landlady, Mme. Enfin, confided to me that her recent lodger had also rented store-rooms in the cellar. Evidently, we were men of a strange similarity in tastes. But it was a long while before I found the opening in the alcove in the last closet and then discovered a flight of stone steps — six or

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eight — down to an iron door in a sort of sub-cellar. Here was my chief trouble; it took me the better part of a day to break the lock on that door. After that it was very simple. There is a passage, not very high but not too low to walk in upright, and it drops down sharply at first and then runs level, turns to the right, then straight ahead, then left; another short flight of steps and a trap in the floor of your cellar, M. Lavaur, directly on the spot where we stood when examining the place. Had it been unbolted we should have fallen through.”

“ This is exactly in line with my conclusions,” Lavaur said, with some elation. “ I must go through that tunnel myself.”

“ Wait a moment,” I interposed, holding up my hand, “ there is one very important point to be ascertained. Does the proprietor of that house, your Mme. Enfin, know of the existence of that tunnel? ”

“ That is of course important, m’sieur,” replied the detective gravely, “ and it is difficult to be certain. However, I think not. She has recently leased the house and she is known as a perfectly reputable person. But some one does know; either Per-

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sifal knew, or came with directions from some one who did know. He could not have supposed such a thing without previous knowledge of both houses, and he evidently did know exactly what to do. It is immensely important to discover this man, and I can assure you, messieurs, that I shall use my best endeavors.”

“ I cannot imagine who this man is,” I reflected; “ I did not know that Dr. Lloyd had an enemy.”

“ Let monsieur consider that point with care,” said M. Delcasse; “ it is well to look into the unfortunate gentleman’s past; it is there that the key will be found. Possibly some woman may have had cause to seek revenge, some —— ”

“ You didn’t know the man,” I retorted, with some impatience; “ he wasn’t at all that sort.”

The detective bowed, he was deferential but he was unconvinced.

“ It is very difficult, m’sieur, to read complex characters. The gentleman was no longer very young? Sixty odd? Ah!” he elevated brows and shoulders; “ how many years to make a record. It is not possible to look it all over at a glance. If

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he had not bitter enemies, at least, there must have been estrangements. Jealousies? — he was rich — he was peculiar.”

“ If you had been here half an hour ago you would have seen his most pronounced enemy and rival in a long lawsuit, Mr. Hez Portman.”

“ Ah,” said M. Delcasse softly, “ I should like to see him.”

“ It is quite worth while,” I remarked, with a smile.

He looked at me slightly perplexed.

Lavour rose. “ Come,” he said, “ I want to see this passage.”

“ It is very dirty, m’sieur,” said poor Delcasse, with despair written on his face.

“ Oh, that’s of no account,” replied Lavour cheerfully; “ we each carry a light — so as to avoid it. Will you lead us, M. Delcasse? ”

The detective rose with something like a sigh.

“ You will follow with some care, messieurs, for the way is rather rough and unexpected.”

“ Queer old rookery,” remarked Lavour cheerfully, “ and queer old way of escaping. This is certainly mediæval.”

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M. Delcasse used his lantern and we were obliged to proceed in single file. We entered the closet and descended the stairs that Lavaur and I had explored together. On reaching the place between the walls in the cellar, M. Delcasse warned us to be careful as he had left the trap open. It was a square hole in the floor which was of large flag stones; one of these opened up like a door; we could see the recently greased hinges in the light of our lamps. An unpleasant odor of mould and earth assailed our nostrils and a huge rat skurried past diving into the opening. Delcasse warned us again, this time to be careful that no chance draught extinguished our lights and then we plunged down the steps which had been recently cleared by some one who had dug away the accumulation of ages. At the foot of the steps, we landed on a flint pavement, and found ourselves in a tunnel — or narrow cellar — underground. Delcasse and Lavaur could stand upright, but I — who was considerably taller — had to stoop to escape knocking my head on the low arches. I raised my lamp and looked at the walls as we passed; they still held but they oozed with

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slime and mould and now and then the way was slippery underfoot. It had taken no small courage and a mighty passion of hate to carry any one through this tomb-like place with murder in his heart. I could not imagine who this enemy was. We made our way slowly, stumbling as we went, and the detective pointed out, here and there, the signs of recent use — that is, as recent as a month or six weeks before. There was a place on the wall where the mould had been rubbed off by contact with an elbow or a shoulder, there were other places where refuse had been shovelled away; some human mole had burrowed here with the fiendish patience that is given to some criminals in pursuit of their nefarious ends. As we approached the outlet into the other house, M. Delcasse told us not to talk. He thought it improbable that any one should have intruded into his cellar closet, but precaution was infinitely wise. Here, as in the house on the rue Fontaine St. Georges, stone steps ascended and here, too, the door opened up and let us into a space between the wall of the house and the false partition.

Both Lavaur and I were now nearly as

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dirty and green stained as our guide, and we only stayed long enough to ascertain the ease with which the secret visitor could emerge from the subterranean passage. We could make no comments, for M. Delcasse was sternly silent, and after examining the freshly oiled locks and hinges, we retraced our steps as rapidly as possible.

Once out of ear shot of No. 24, I asked Lavaur if he was satisfied with his discoveries.

“ I am delighted,” he retorted, with a chuckle, and went on to tell Delcasse of Portman’s latest move, the return of the purchaser of the poison.

We were by this time stumbling up the stairs to Dr. Lloyd’s quarters and I could not see the detective’s face.

“ A woman is not always so easy to probe, m’sieur,” he said gravely, casting a blight on Lavaur’s optimism. “ A woman will not betray one she loves — not wittingly — and she is often difficult to handle as a witness. But M. le Prefect will be glad to see her.”

There was one thing in this novel aspect

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of the case, however, which gave me an unusual feeling of relief.

“ At least,” I said, “ this discovery seems to help to eliminate old Cartouche from the case, and to confirm his statement that the cellar door was locked the morning after the murder.”

“ But it was not locked, m’sieur,” replied Delcasse mildly.

“ It was not locked? ” I repeated slowly; “ are you advised of this? ”

“ M’sieur, I was here — on that morning — with *M. le Maire*,” replied Delcasse, “ I was here before you got here. The first door I tried was that. It was not locked then, and no suspicion of murder arose until some hours afterwards. It not only was not locked but the key had fallen on the floor; I myself replaced it.”

“ Then Cartouche lied,” I said, “ and that is a bad point against him.”

“ A man will often lie at such times from terror,” said the detective smoothly; “ but he may have forgotten, and when he thought of it he found it locked, for I shut and locked it myself.”

Lavour walked up and down the room rubbing his hands softly and smiling.

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“ ‘Pon my soul,’ he said, ‘ it is really interesting. Have a glass of wine, Delcasse. No, Brinton, stay — it is not Chateau Yquem.’ ”

“ I will stay, but no wine,” I said stiffly, and caught M. Delcasse looking at me attentively, much as a cat watches a mouse.

I turned hot all over; confound the man! Did he think? I got up and opened a window; the air choked me. Outside there was a light mist which veiled the commonplace aspect of the streets, but the sounds of the city were cheerful and reassuring; even this place — with its hideous secret — was prosaic, for I heard Lavour pulling a cork! I shut the window with a snap and bade them good night, nor could they induce me to stay. I put on my overcoat and hat and went out into the murky night; the wind had gone down and the fog was thickening, a vapor from damp streets and steaming roofs. The street lamps blinked like great eyes; I was beset by the memory of the bowed black-clad figure in the cage at the Nouvelle Force, and the knotted, old, toil-worn hands that clasped the bars while old Cartonche had cast his looks of deep suspicion at me. I began — I believe — to

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suspect myself, so fiercely can a charge like this come home. While I thought of these things I became conscious — as I had been once or twice before — that I was followed, and I remembered M. Delcasse saying that I had been shadowed ever since Lloyd's death. I was of two minds about turning back to fight the whole police force of Paris and then — I do not know why — I suddenly remembered Anice Holland and forbore to make myself ridiculous.

CHAPTER XVIII

A MANAGING AUNT

That night, on my return to my hotel, I found a note from Mrs. Erckmann asking me to call on her at an early hour the following morning. As she had shown anything but a preference for me or for my legal services, I was rather at loss to interpret this sudden summons. But I must confess that it had come to a pass when anything that took me to see Anice Holland was welcome. I was prompt, therefore, in my response to the note, nor did I have to wait. As soon as I reached the hotel I was shown up to Mrs. Erckmann's parlor and found her waiting for me — apparently with some impatience. Her florid face was even more flushed than usual and her shrewd, commonplace features wore an expression which warned me that there were breakers ahead. She greeted me very casually.

“How d'ye do, Mr. Brinton?” she said; “I sent for you because I thought I could

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talk to you better than I could write. Of course, you know that it's this unpleasant matter of Dr. Lloyd's will?"

"I assumed as much," I replied, taking the chair that she indicated — a stiff and uninviting one, by the way — and giving her my undivided attention.

"Of course, when I came over here, I felt that I had everything virtually arranged," she went on, with ill-suppressed displeasure; "I brought up my niece, Anice Holland; I was one of her legal guardians until she was of age, and I feel that I am the person — of all others — who should receive her confidence and obedience. But, no sooner did she get here and fall under the influence of that very frivolous person, Lady Bentinck, than she began to disregard my plans. I can assure you, Mr. Brinton, that it is very embarrassing and I can't stand it at all! I sent for you — frankly, I sent for you to say that Anice acted without authority and very foolishly in asking you to be her lawyer; I had already engaged Mr. Gibbs and — I am sure you see how impossible it is! She has been very foolish and — of course you will release her from such an arrangement."

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“ I appreciate your embarrassment, Mrs. Erckmann,” I said, “ but does Miss Holland regret her arrangement? Are you authorized to speak for her? ”

She looked at me with ill concealed ire in her small blue eyes.

“ I should think I had told you enough to show my authority,” she said sharply.

“ Pardon me,” I replied suavely, “ but Miss Holland is of age and has full authority to act for herself. Of course, I appreciate your position and all its embarrassments, but I feel myself under an engagement to act for her, and I feel honored by her choice. If she, on the other hand, feels that she has made a mistake, I shall instantly withdraw.”

“ In other words, Mr. Brinton, you don't care for my feelings, or anything else,” she cried hotly, turning still redder; “ I must say frankly that I think it's presumption. I couldn't have told you any plainer how I felt, if I tried — and you persist in holding on to this case? Really, I — I —— ” she broke off breathless. The black jets with which her silk dress was covered seemed to scintillate on her palpitating bosom.

“ My dear madam,” I said gently, con-

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cealing my amusement, "you have spoken with great frankness, but my attitude is too simple to need explanation. I am counsel for Miss Holland and, of course, expect her to say whether or no I am to continue in that capacity. As I am also Lady Bentinck's counsel, it would be much simpler that I should. If you will allow me to see your niece for a moment it can all be settled at once."

"My niece is out," she retorted, with acrimony; "I do not consider it necessary to consult a mere child like that about business matters. I am surprised—very much surprised at your attitude, Mr. Brinton."

I grew hot, and felt the blood going up to my hair.

"My dear madam, my position at the present moment is very unpleasant," I said frankly; "but you must remember that you are not a party to the suit."

"Not a party to the suit?" she replied, with a gasp of anger, "Anice Holland's aunt! I'd like to know what I've been doing all these years but working in her interest, and I'm working now. Not a party to the suit, indeed! In my opinion, there

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should be no suit. Oh, yes, I know what you want to argue, but you know what the Scriptures say? Lawyers 'devour widows' houses.' All you lawyers want to do, is to get a case like this into court and, good heavens, she'd be gray before she saw the money!"

Angry as I was at the woman's insolence and prejudice, I could not forbear a smile.

" 'The law's delay' is a proverb, Mrs. Erckmann," I retorted, " but I am not sure that I could swallow a widow's house even had I the appetite. Having drawn the true will for Dr. Lloyd, I have but one desire and that is to see your niece get that which is rightly hers."

She smiled — a thin acid smile, looking at me shrewdly.

" My dear sir," she said, with an attempt at coolness, " it is hinted that my niece's inheritance is quite an inducement for you lawyers to espouse her cause."

I rose. " Madam," I said sternly, " I am not at loss to divine who suggested that motive to you. It is quite true that I love your niece — it is premature to say so — but I do love her with entire disinterestedness, and if she wishes me to give up the

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case — if she wishes to give up her just rights, I am more than willing to acquiesce. It would be more to my taste, for I should hesitate to ask Miss Holland, the heiress, to share my —— ”

I stopped short, for in the door opposite was Anice Holland and her eyes told me that she had heard all. She had just come in and wore her walking suit with much soft dark fur about her throat and her hat cast a slight shadow over her face which was singularly pale. Mrs. Erckmann turned sharply, saw her in the door, and rose with a crimson face, evidently divided between a desire to castigate me with her tongue and to keep Anice in ignorance.

“ We do not need you at this moment, Anice! ” she said sharply.

“ Pardon me, ” I interposed, feeling that there was but one course to pursue, no matter how dangerous to my cause; “ I particularly desire to speak to Miss Holland. ”

Anice flushed deeply and stood irresolute. I could see that her position was singularly embarrassing. Mrs. Erckmann resumed her seat with a determined and scintillating front.

“ I hope you will state the case briefly, ”

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she remarked, "for I have an engagement."

"Don't let me detain you," I replied, with gallantry; "I particularly desire to speak to Miss Holland."

Anice had not said a word; she stood with her hand on the back of a high chair, the picture of charming confusion.

"My niece also has an engagement," retorted Mrs. Erckmann.

"My dear aunt," said the girl gently, "I am here to — I have no engagement now."

Her aunt gave her a furious look and leaned back in her chair with tightly compressed lips.

"Miss Holland," I said, "Mrs. Erckmann sent for me this morning to inform me that my services were not desired in the impending suit over Dr. Lloyd's will. I told her that I felt that it was for you to decide about that. I am ready to serve you to the end, but — on the other hand — if you would prefer another attorney, I am quite as ready to withdraw."

The girl gave her aunt a quick indignant glance.

"I asked you to take my case, Mr. Brin-

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ton," she said, with spirit, "and I meant what I said. I have not changed my mind."

I bowed gravely and was about to reply when Mrs. Erckmann interposed.

"Anice," she said bitterly, "you know — everybody will soon know — that this man is accused of — of a crime. I'm amazed at you."

"Ah, you have seen Mr. Schenck," I said coldly; "it is quite true, Miss Holland, I am open to suspicion of putting the poison in Dr. Lloyd's glass."

Anice held out her hand. "I do not believe it for a moment," she said sweetly.

"I never thought you would," I replied, clasping her hand warmly.

"Humph!" ejaculated Mrs. Erckmann rising, "I suppose this is enough. You know, Anice, that I disapprove of your whole course — entirely disapprove."

"I'm afraid you do, aunt," Anice replied, serenely, though with blushes; "but I am old enough now to decide for myself. You do not approve of this lawsuit, and I do. I shall stand with my cousin, Serena Bentinck."

"A very nice thing to say," remarked

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Mrs. Erckmann, "considering your indebtedness to Andrew Schenck."

The young girl turned crimson. "Mr. Schenck shall have it all back, Aunt Erckmann," she said proudly, "and I did not borrow from him."

"Which is an imputation against me!" cried her aunt furiously.

"I am quite certain that money matters need be no cause of embarrassment to Miss Holland," I interposed, "for we mean to win her suit."

"Oh, I suppose so!" snapped the irate woman, stiffening herself; "you would not be so anxious to undertake it otherwise."

"Aunt!" cried Anice, with pitiful embarrassment.

"I hope Miss Holland understands that I would serve her in any cause," I said, determinedly; "at all times, and in all places — for her sake alone."

"That's all very heroic," said Mrs. Erckmann, with biting irony.

Anice did not dare look at me, but there was nothing forbidding in the sweetly downcast face. I felt that it was time to withdraw.

"I shall consider that I am still retained

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as your attorney," I said, " unless otherwise notified by you," and I bowed to Mrs. Erckmann.

" Of all the impertinence!" she remarked, *sotto voce*.

Anice held out her hand again; she was blushing up to her pretty little ears and her eyes were shy of mine.

" Au revoir," I said softly, " and believe me — rash as it is to say so — all that you heard is true."

Her hand fluttered in mine and she gave me a sweet shy glance. I passed out deeply moved and flushed with hope.

It was hard, indeed, to leave her to battle with that vulgar, ill-tempered woman, to leave her without saying more — much more, no matter how premature such speech would be. I confess that I was carried away, and, for the moment, elated. She had heard my declaration to her aunt, she could not have misunderstood it, nor what I had said to her, and she had not discouraged me! I walked on air and, such being the case, had not the sense to avoid an interview with Lord Bentinck, little as I desired to talk to ordinary mortals then, to return — in fact — from Arcady.

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Bentinck caught me at the elevator.

“ Oh,” he ejaculated, “ awfully glad to see you, Brinton, don't you know I was just on my way over. Serena's got an extraordinary letter. She's simply crazy to show it to you. Come right in and see it. It's from Mr. Portman.”

“ Oh!” I ejaculated, putting aside the excuse I had been framing; “ does it bear on the case? ”

“ Well, I think the old duffer has simply gone crazy,” he retorted, good humoredly; “ but Serena is wild with delight and curiosity. She'll explain.”

As he spoke we reached the door of their suite of apartments and Lady Serena was revealed in a pink morning gown with artistically dishevelled curls and a general air of excited elation.

“ Oh, what luck!” she cried; “ where did you find him, Tommy? ”

“ At the elevator,” replied her spouse, with his usual matter of fact manner.

Serena viewed me with the eye of a great general — in female shape, and she displayed a genius for discovering details.

“ You have been to see Anice,” she declared at once, “ and she was evidently nice

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to you. She's a love, John; positively — if I were a man —— ”

“ Oh, stuff, Serena! ” interposed Bentinck, “ a man — you! ”

She flashed a look at him. “ My dear Tommy, ” she said, with fine scorn; “ you don't half appreciate me, I —— ”

“ Let us have the letter, my dear girl, ” said her husband, with diplomacy.

“ Of course, ” she retorted, with elaborate composure, “ it has simply been waiting on you. You will talk so much about other things. ”

“ Ye gods! ” groaned Bentinck, and took a chair.

Serena drew a letter from a long yellow business envelope and unfolding it, patted it out flat and handed it to me. It was a curious letter from old Hez Portman, perfectly characteristic of the man. It reiterated his eternal proposition, a compromise for the hundredth acre. In return he offered some information which — so he asserted — would close the will case at once. I, of course, was not unprepared for this, but it had come sooner than I had anticipated. Meanwhile, Lady Serena was looking at me with great eagerness.

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“ What do you think of that? ” she cried.

I shook my head smiling. “ Simply that Andrew Schenck has refused to accept Portman’s terms,” I replied; “ they were probably hard.”

“ Oh, no! ” cried Serena, “ it’s more than that—more than that. I am going to see the old man himself.”

“ It seems to me,” interposed Bentinck mildly, “ that that comes within my province.”

“ And mine,” I added thoughtfully; “ but none of us can make terms now.”

“ Except myself,” declared Serena, smiling sweetly; “ and I shall. Do you suppose I shall lose a chance like that? He knows something — and he’ll tell me! ”

CHAPTER XIX

THE OFFERS TO COMPROMISE

In spite of the eagerness of Lady Serena we were compelled to move slowly. We had no more power to make an agreement with Portman than Schenck had, and I had to point out the difficulty of surrendering the hundredth acre before we had it. Even if Anice Holland acted with Lady Bentinck, we were powerless to make more than a conditional bargain, and was Portman's information worth the barter? There was grave doubt. Lord Bentinck was peculiarly sensitive to this form of argument and brought the force of his disapproval to bear on his wife's impetuosity and kept her from writing personally to the old man. I promised to see Hez for her, but I was destined to quite another kind of an interview before that.

I confess that, once safely out of the hotel, I felt less interest in Hez Portman and the hundredth acre than I did in Anice Holland's blushes and smiles. A great

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deal had happened to me since I set out that morning to make a business call on Mrs. Erckmann and the result was rather confusing. I had scarcely dreamed of speaking my mind then, or even hinting my feeling for Anice, and yet I had done both — though accidentally — and I could not feel that I had been discouraged. I walked home, therefore, lost in a pleasant reverie, in which Lloyd's death and the will case had very little part.

I had done well in my profession; I was a successful lawyer and I could afford to dispense with any wish for a wife with a dowry. I was willing to fight for her rights but I was quite as willing to forego the money, so the uncertainty of these matters did not greatly affect me. But a surprise awaited me at my hotel. After the scene at Lavaur's lodgings the night before, and Schenck's anger and defiance, and the recent evidence in Mrs. Erckmann's action of his secret resentment, I had no expectation of any overtures from him; I was the more surprised, therefore, to find him waiting for my return and to see, at a glance, that the man was changed. That he was, in a word, cowed, no matter how he had

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tried to face it out. He endeavored to assume the manner of a man who had been injured and misinterpreted, but was still magnanimous. I cannot say that I even met his advances half way, for I held him in extreme contempt. However, he ignored my manner. He was seated in a secluded corner of the hotel reading-room where he had been waiting for me, it appeared, the better part of an hour. He rose with a sheepish attempt at bravado.

“ I consider myself a pretty magnanimous fellow to come here,” he said, “ after your treatment of me last night. I should have sent Gibbs — but Gibbs would think me a fool for my pains.”

“ It is well sometimes to follow your lawyer’s advice,” I remarked dryly, looking at my watch; “ I have just ten minutes, Mr. Schenck, to listen to you.”

He flushed but I saw that he was making a supreme effort to control his temper.

“ Perhaps you will find it worth while to be more courteous,” he said; “ I didn’t come here in my own interests. It is up to me to fight this thing out or to do something generous for those two girls. If they were men, I’d let the d—d thing go on, but

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as it is — Hang it all, can't you see that I want to be generous."

I had remained standing and so had he, but he sat down now on the edge of the table opposite and rapped his knuckles on it.

"What do you want to do?" I asked coolly.

"Compromise, of course," he said, with an off-hand manner, "give the girls a chance — something handsome and close the whole business up."

I laughed outright. "We don't consider that you are in a position to give," I retorted; "we contend that under the true will you have nothing to divide with my clients."

"That's all d—d nonsense," he said coarsely, "you can't break that will. Don't you think I know bluff when I see it?"

I shrugged my shoulders.

"I have no instructions to consider a compromise," I said.

"Nevertheless, you can listen to my proposition," he said sharply; "it's not often that a man in my position is willing to offer terms."

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“ You wouldn’t do it, Mr. Schenck,” I replied, with contempt, “ if you were not cornered, and you know it.”

He scowled fiercely. “ I deny that I am cornered,” he said hoarsely; “ your whole case is a d—d conspiracy against me; you want to ruin me.”

“ Then why do you wish to deal with us? ”

He walked up and down in front of the window, his hands clenched.

“ Don’t you suppose I have some feeling for my two cousins? ” he cried, with a virtuous air; “ do you suppose I want them cut off? You turn on me as if I were a blackguard because my uncle preferred me. It was natural enough, I’m a favorite sister’s son.”

“ But he didn’t prefer you,” I retorted, “ I know that from his own lips. I saw him the night before he died.”

“ All Paris knows that! ” he exclaimed, with a sneer.

“ Mr. Schenck,” I said, “ I abhor a scene in a public place, but if you say another word in that tone — I’ll knock you down.”

He laughed but he did not repeat the in-

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situation, not from lack of brute courage, however, for I never thought him a physical coward. He continued to walk up and down. I consulted my watch again.

“I must bid you good day,” I said sharply.

He turned and faced me. “Don’t be a fool,” he said harshly; “I’m going to offer your clients terms that they’ll never get in any court.”

I smiled sardonically. “You’ll have to state them very briefly,” I said, holding my watch in my hand.

“It’s an enormous offer,” he said; “it’s out of all common-sense proportions, but I don’t want to quarrel with them; they’ve the only relatives I have in the world. I’m willing to give each of the girls five hundred thousand dollars.”

“I decline the offer,” I replied promptly, dropping my time-piece into my pocket and buttoning up my coat.

His face underwent a strange change. “You’re a blamed fool!” he exclaimed sharply.

“Thanks awfully,” I replied; “how much did you propose to pay Hez Portman to shut his mouth?”

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He shot a look at me which I could not interpret, but I saw that he was already furious and being a coarse man he choked it with an effort.

“Portman’s an old fool,” he said; “I’ll see him in h—ll before I’d give him a cent.”

“But you’d give him the hundredth acre,” I retorted coolly. “See here, Mr. Schenck, we’ve got you — figuratively speaking — under the fifth rib. You can’t fight us and you can’t buy us. What do you propose to do?”

In spite of his anger, he was watching me furtively. I could not tell whether or not he suspected my bluff, but of one thing I grew more and more convinced — with a sharp sense of triumph — the fellow was afraid.

“You are treating me like a scamp,” he said, “and I’ve made an offer that no other man in my place would make — indeed, I’m a blamed fool to make it.”

“You offered half,” I said coolly, “because you stand to lose the whole. My clients absolutely decline to compromise with you.”

“You have not consulted them,” he ex-

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claimed sharply; "you want this suit to come on so as to show off before Anice Holland. Do you think I'm blind? But I can tell you, if you get her you won't get a d—cent with her."

"No one but a cad drags a woman's name into such a discussion," I replied, with scorn; "I do not care to hear more, Mr. Schenck," and I turned away.

But he was persistent and followed me.

"It's the last time I shall make this proposition," he said, "and you'll lose the chance altogether."

I laughed. "I refer you to Mr. Portman," I said maliciously; "perhaps you'd better compromise with him and so tie up his tongue."

"D—n Portman!" he cried, "and— you for your insolence. I'll see to it that you pay for this, John Brinton. You'll lose your case and your reputation besides. I ——" he stopped, choking with impotent rage.

His vehemence was attracting attention. I picked up my hat and stick from the table.

"I bid you good day, Mr. Schenck," I said coolly and left him.

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More convinced than ever that there was something in Hez Portman's proposition, I determined to see him and sound him at once. I went up stairs to my room with the hope of finding something definite from either M. Delcasse or Lavaur. That Henry Persifal was the murderer of Dr. Lloyd, or the accomplice of the murderer, seemed to my mind the strongest possibility, but I could not surmise anything from a case that was proving day by day more baffling. That the will found in Dr. Lloyd's cabinet was a forgery I had no doubt, but when it was executed and when the substitution took place, I could not imagine. It might have been on the night of his murder, it might have been long before, at the time of the drawing of the true will, in fact. He had not broken the seals, having changed his mind about it almost as soon as he withdrew it from the bank. There, to my mind, lay the key to the whole matter; the person who substituted that forgery had the desire and the motive to kill Lloyd. The idea — always prominent with the police — that there was a secret in his past life and that an old enemy — probably a woman — had killed him, or bribed Cartouche

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to kill him, did not find credence with me. He had not been a man of that stamp, but a coolly selfish philosopher, indifferent to women and never unkind or brutal enough to do a wilful injury to any one. As for Schenck, he was influenced by some dread of Portman; Portman knew something — what I could not divine. Schenck could not be guilty of his uncle's murder and short of that I could not quite reason out a motive strong enough to force him to his peculiar manœuvre of today.

While I was still occupied with these thoughts, I was destined to another surprise and one that was peculiarly unpleasant after my experience of the morning. I was dressing for dinner when one of the hotel employes brought me a note. I did not recognize the writing and broke the seal without premonition. It was dated at Meurice's, an hour previous.

“ My dear Mr. Brinton,” it ran, “ I am so sorry to seem capricious, but I must withdraw from my position of this morning. I find that the pressure is too great to withstand. It is best that you should not be my counsel in the will case. You

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do not know how much I regret this, and I hope you will forgive me.

“ Sincerely yours,
“ Anice Holland.”

It was a thunderbolt from a clear sky and I stood staring at it in some perplexity. Then I made up my mind that I should not accept this as her free action until so assured by her. The wording of the note was so peculiar that it seemed to suggest some interference—some threat from Mrs. Erckmann. It was possible, of course, that Anice had realized more fully the meaning of my words and manner and the desire to withdraw from her business engagement with me was prompted by a wish to thus put off my addresses. This was indeed my first conclusion, but something in her words at the end contradicted that. I could understand Mrs. Erckmann's attitude easily enough; she had borrowed money from Schenck and she was anxious to propitiate him, and she did not believe that we could break the will. She was fighting—in her short-sighted way—for what seemed to her the surest gain, and she fancied that her niece would be certain of

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the money if she could be once safely married to the heir. She would be sure to stand between me and the girl as long as she could, and I could only learn the truth from Anice's own lips and I could not accept such a summary dismissal. I should see her, and I straightway ceased to consider Portman and Schenck. But, though I went twice to the hotel that evening, I failed to see her and was compelled to devour my impatience and wait until morning when chance was more propitious than she was.

CHAPTER XX

AN AGREEMENT

I had made three separate attempts to see Anice at the hotel and was waxing desperate when I chanced upon the whole party entering the Louvre. Mrs. Erckmann who had seen nothing, and never would see anything with the seeing eye, was an indefatigable tourist; she had the instinct that leads to vandalism in the collection of souvenirs. Anice, on the other hand, loved art for its own sake with a rare appreciation for a girl brought up with such limitations. They had been doing the Louvre at intervals ever since their arrival in Paris which accounted for my search taking that direction. As I have said, fate was kinder to me than Anice, for Lady Serena was with them, and Lady Serena was certainly gifted with the art of divination. No sooner did she see the constraint with which Anice greeted me, and the feeling which I tried in vain to dismiss from my manner, than she telegraphed a look of

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sympathy over Mrs. Erckmann's towering bonnet.

"You are in the very nick of time, John," she said, with bare-faced indifference to the irate aunt's manner; "I hate to do things without a man — and Bentinck simply won't look at pictures; he says he's lived with his ancestors too long. It's a fact that I found a lot of the family portraits turned to the wall when I went down to the family seat in Dorset. Imagine such brutal irreverence!"

"I don't think I can give this much time today," said Mrs. Erckmann irrelevantly, stiffening as she looked pointedly at me; "I have other plans."

"To be sure," replied Lady Serena, "we were going down to a café to get something to eat. John, do take charge of Anice while I take Mrs. Erckmann to see this picture, it's a love; you know these angels are famous? I'm sure you love angels — we all want to be angels, of course!" and she dragged Mrs. Erckmann away, chatting volubly all the while; her graceful figure a strange contrast to her companion's.

I was not slow to grasp my opportunity.

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“ I received your note,” I said gravely, “ and I regret that you do not care for my services, though, of course, I wanted you to feel at liberty to dispense with them at will.”

She blushed deeply and her eyes were troubled.

“ But I do care,” she said simply; “ I want you to understand that. I do care — I should have been so pleased to have you represent me, but — but it did not seem best.”

“ I cannot quite understand,” I said bluntly; “ your aunt thinks that I will injure your cause? I know that Schenck has poisoned her mind with the charge that I am liable to suspicion in this case. If I had felt that there was the slightest impediment in the way of my serving you, I should never have offered to do so. For myself it does not matter — but I beg of you not to unite your legal interests with Schenck’s, it would be fatal. But — perhaps, I go too far; I have no right to advise.”

“ I am so sorry,” she said with a break in her voice; “ I was forced to do it — I am —— ” she broke off.

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Lady Serena had carried Mrs. Erckmann the whole length of the salon, but I saw her giving us anxious looks, as though she could not hold the enemy long. One or two other visitors were examining the pictures and referring to their catalogues, but we were practically alone.

“ I do not understand,” I said; “ you were ‘ forced ’ ? ”

She was playing with her muff and she was obviously distressed.

“ Do not ask me,” she murmured; “ I cannot tell you — but I believe it was for the best — for you.”

“ You are pleased to deal in enigmas,” I replied, with feeling; “ I know how your aunt feels toward me, but I hoped — Forgive me, I can’t help speaking; it doesn’t seem a time for conventionalities, and your opinion matters much to me — it makes all the difference. It isn’t possible that you believe in these idle accusations? that you think me a criminal? ”

“ Never — never for a moment,” she cried impetuously, “ it was to save you from that, to — ” she broke off.

“ To save me from what? ” I asked

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gravely; "now I have the right to an explanation."

She gave me an imploring look.

"Don't ask me," she pleaded, "I have bungled miserably. I——"

"You will tell me," I said, gently but firmly; "it would be unfair not to tell me. You withdrew your interests from my hands to protect me from what? I fancy that I can divine the rest— from the vengeance of Andy Schenck?"

"That sounds so absurd," she said, with spirit; "he is so unworthy of any one's consideration."

"Yet I was right in a way," I persisted.

She avoided my eyes.

"In a way, yes," she admitted, with reluctance.

"Ah," I said, quietly, "you have told me; I have seen Schenck and I know his trump card. He means to give publicity to Cartouche's suspicions and accusations of me, and that, fortunately, has no terrors for my mind. I can understand, however, that you would not care for a counsel with such unpleasant notoriety."

"Oh, but that is not it—I beg of you not to feel that that could influence my

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friendship in the least," she pleaded, " but
—— "

" Isn't it rather useless for us to fence behind conventionalities?" I said; " I care too much for that — I have a right to ask for justice, but I have no right to speak of what is in my heart, it is premature, and all that! But it has come to this — I feel too much to keep silence. Is it possible that you cared to save me from it for my own sake? "

She averted her face but her manner was not that of anger.

" Will you answer? " I demanded gently.

I saw, over her head, Serena's dumb but frantic signals that Mrs. Ereckmann was about to escape. We had walked on as we talked and were down at the extreme end of the salon.

" You do not wish to answer me? " I suggested gravely.

" I did care," she faltered, without looking up; " I could not bear to have them make that false accusation against you."

" Ah," I said, softly but joyfully, " nothing matters after that. Let them accuse me! "

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Mrs. Erckmann bore down upon us, the redness of her complexion accentuated by the purple orchid that nodded in the aggressive front of her bonnet. Lady Serena walking behind looked the picture of comic despair.

“Anice, we’re going at once!” said her aunt, sharply.

Anice turned without a word and held out her hand to me; she did not even smile but her eyes were softly luminous.

“Mrs. Erckmann,” I said gravely, “have you seen Mr. Schenck? He is offering to compromise—almost at any terms to save himself a share.”

Her jaw fell and she stared at me like a vicious fish.

“I don’t believe he needs to,” she said harshly, “and I’m sure that I—for one—should be glad to hear of it.”

“Don’t you listen to it, Miss Holland,” I advised.

“She shall not,” declared Lady Serena, “I shall not let her! Come over to tea at five, John, but see Hez Portman first.”

I thanked her with more fervor and sincerity than a mere invitation to tea required, and she laughed a little, her hand

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on her cousin's arm. Mrs. Erckmann walked out ahead of us like an angry turkey.

I saw them to their carriage and went away with a light heart. After all, Schenck's manœuvre had been for my benefit. Yet I was conscious, with new irritation, that I was followed. The thought of arrest was peculiarly hateful at that moment. One does not like to fall from great heights to an abyss.

Cartouche was to be brought to trial the next week and I was well aware that his counsel was preparing to spring a sensational accusation and that I should probably be called upon to figure conspicuously. I saw how Anice felt about it, too, which increased my uneasiness. It was naturally detestable to her and an indignity to me. If I could only solve this mystery out of hand! Of course, the revelation of the secret staircase and the tunnel would add another feature to the case and one that would reflect on the concierge; he was still the most likely person to accuse except the elusive Henry Persifal. In my own heart, however, I had always absolved Cartouche.

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It was while busy with these thoughts that, in obedience to Lady Serena's urgent request, I turned my steps toward the Grand Hotel de Louvre, where old Hez Portman had taken up his quarters. One of the most expensive and gay of the new hotels of Paris and a curious background for the man; but Hez was one that liked to get his money's worth.

I had scarcely sent up my card before a message came down for me to come up to Mr. Portman's room. The old man was rich and sometimes liked to parade it, but he had strange streaks of New England "nearness" and his quarters showed such an outbreak in the midst of the luxurious hotel. I found him in a small room in the fifth story, sitting in his shirt sleeves, at a writing table, with a glass of strong drink at his elbow. He greeted me with great composure.

"Sit down," he said, "and have a cocktail. No? Well, I don't blame you; these Frenchies don't know how to fix up a decent drink, let alone a good boiled dinner. I've been eating patties before grass, and consummies, and entrances, until my stom-

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ach feels like a garbage can. I'd give something handsome for a good, plain dish of cabbage and bacon."

"The French are considered past masters of the culinary art," I remarked, suppressing a smile.

"Culinary art be d—d!" he replied heartily; "I like good Yankee cooking and no frills."

He leaned back in his chair and sipped his cocktail with the air of a man resigned to small discomforts.

"I s'pose you've come to talk business," he went on, after this momentary interruption.

"I've come in reply to your letter to Lady Bentinck," I said briefly; "I'm her attorney."

He nodded, giving me a shrewd look.

"Well, sir," he said, with the manner of a man who enjoyed the situation, "what are your terms?"

"Our terms can scarcely be stated without some idea of the value of your revelations," I replied.

He laughed, striking his knee with the open palm of his hand.

"By Jove," he said, "do you think I'm

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going to let the cat out of the bag without some substantial agreement? ”

“ There can be no doubt that we would pay for it,” I said tentatively.

“ Pshaw,” he retorted, with disgust, “ do you think I want money? ”

“ No,” I replied, “ but you want its equivalent.”

He nodded, his pugnacious face hardening.

“ I want the hundredth acre,” he said sharply.

“ You evidently failed to make terms with Schenck,” I remarked carelessly.

He smiled grimly. “ To tell you the truth,” he said, “ I think he’s too big a scamp to deal with. Not that I’m morally averse to dealing with a scamp when I can tie him up, but you can’t tie an eel.”

I leaned back in my chair and looked out of the window reflectively; I had an almost exclusive view of chimney-pots, but I pretended to find them engrossing. Portman watched me, drumming the table with short, square fingers.

“ Well? ” he said, at last.

I turned and looked squarely into his eyes.

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“ What is it worth to us? ” I demanded coolly.

“ Well,” he said, “ I suppose that Andy Schenck is about the only one that cares about the will as it is.”

“ Who cares about the will found in Dr. Lloyd’s cabinet,” I corrected.

He gave me a sharp look. “ Ho,” he said, “ you’re going to contend that it is a forgery? ”

“ Does that affect your statement? ” I asked.

“ No,” he replied, “ not a whit. But if this will can be set aside at once — without difficulty — and the law divides the estate, I take it, that would be the utmost that you could gain? ”

“ I’m not prepared to discuss the matter,” I said, with indifference.

He laughed. “ Lawyer’s tricks,” he said; “ you couldn’t get more. You’ve no other will to prove. See here, Brinton, what terms will you make if I undertake to wipe out Schenck — as clean as a sponge takes a chalk mark off a blackboard? ”

“ I can’t see any way of doing that except by killing him,” I replied ironically;

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“ and we would scarcely engage any one to do that.”

“ But I know a way to do it,” said Portman sharply, “ and it’s not murder either,” and with that he lay back in his chair and chuckled maliciously.

For my part I was watching the man with a good deal of incredulity. I could not imagine what he meant and I began to doubt his business acumen, for which I had before felt a good deal of respect. How he intended to bribe or cow Schenck into acquiescence I could not divine; yet, the fact remained that Schenck had shown fear of him. It was a chance; should I stand to lose it? He was watching me, his bulldog head down, but his fierce eyes on mine.

“ Mr. Portman,” I said, at last, “ you are a business man; if report says true, rather a hard one. You will understand then, that the goods are usually paid for only on delivery. Make good your offer and we’ll certainly pay.”

He looked hard at me; he had fought his battle with tenacity and he meant to win.

“ I have a price,” he said harshly, “ that line — exactly as it stands surveyed on my map — including the hundredth acre on the

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east side of Lloyd's farm and Meadow Farm brook."

I smiled. "If you will eliminate Schenck from the case," I said, "I'll promise that." I regarded the offer as an impossibility.

"You'll put that in writing," he demanded, clapping his hand down on the table.

I hesitated a moment. Could I act for Anice? I thought so.

"I will put that conditional agreement on paper," I said.

He turned crimson. He pushed the inkstand and a sheet of paper toward me and I wrote down my acknowledgment of his offer with the qualified agreement. Then he drank off the remainder of his cocktail standing and pitched the glass into the fire-place.

"That's to the hundredth acre!" he exclaimed, "for — by the Lord Harry — I've got it at last!"

I rose. "You're apparently not ready to deliver the goods today," I remarked dryly.

He shook his head. "No," he replied, "but I have an interesting piece of news

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for you," and he fumbled in his pocket producing a telegram which he read through with apparent relish.

"You'll be interested in this," he said, and tossed it across the table.

I picked it up and read the few words it contained.

"Arrived at Havre today. Please send instructions. Mattie."

For a moment I was nonplussed and then its full significance dawned upon me; it was the woman with the red hat! I returned the paper coolly.

"She must have been arrested by this time," I said; "the police have been waiting for her at Havre."

He laughed contemptuously. "Much good that'll do you," he said; "she's game and she'll not tell you much."

"She may when she gets behind the bars," I retorted.

"My dear sir," said old Hez Portman grimly, "when you put her behind the bars you'll do more harm to your case than good and you'll lose all your best chances. You're young and you're green," and he

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folded up my written acknowledgment and put it in his waistcoat pocket.

I turned at the door. "Perhaps, you can tell us, Mr. Portman, why this mysterious woman bought the poison for Dr. Lloyd?"

He gave me a fiercely defiant look.

"I'm d——d if I know!" he said.

CHAPTER XXI

A STARTLING REVELATION

Matters remained in abeyance for twenty-four hours and then I received a letter from Hez Portman appointing a meeting at Lavaur's lodgings for that evening at eight o'clock, when, he indicated, there would be revelations. I had already informed Lavaur of what had transpired and he was deeply interested.

"It looks as if Portman had a hand in it," I remarked.

He mused awhile. "It looks so," he finally admitted, "but, my dear Jack, it is like fancying a bear on a diplomatic mission, and he's going to cut up bear antics, I have no doubt."

We spent considerable time in unprofitable speculations on the probabilities, but we could not imagine what charge he intended to enter against Schenck that would remove him from the contest, and we arrived at no satisfactory conclusions. Though I was not without some dim pre-

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monitions, I was still at sea when I went to the rue Fontaine St. Georges about an hour before the time appointed by old Hez.

Lavaur had just finished his solitary dinner and was in high good humor. I think nothing pleased him more than the thought of a passage-at-arms with old Portman, though our last encounter in these very rooms had been very discomfiting to us. But this time we were both immensely curious and prepared to be entertained. Besides, we knew that M. Delcasse had gone post haste to meet the mysterious woman with the red hat.

Lavaur sat, as usual, enveloped in wreaths of white smoke. The lamps were lighted, the door of the secret staircase securely locked and the place had a more cheerful aspect, less gruesomely suggestive of Lloyd and his mysterious death.

“ We should have invited Andy,” chuckled Lavaur; “ their last meeting here was not only amusing but fruitful, and to leave him out at this critical moment — when he is to be sponged off the face of the globe is — to say the least — cruel. By the way, Jack, we didn’t prove good stage managers last time.”

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“ How a man’s appearance affects his judgment,” I observed; “ if Portman looked saturnine and suave instead of resembling a vicious bulldog, we should accuse him of the murder; as it is, we cannot fancy him sliding up secret staircases or performing any similar feats.”

“ In the first place, he is too fat,” replied Lavour. “ He would still be lodged in the first turn of the stair. But he is abundantly able to pay others to do the sliding.”

“ I have thought of that,” I said, “ but I cannot reconcile it with his type.”

Lavour did not reply. He sat blowing the smoke into rings, evidently thinking deeply all the while.

“ I can’t reconcile it with him, any more than I can reconcile your activity in this case with your usual indifference,” I continued. “ You are not generally in love with action of any kind.”

“ My dear fellow, you are like a hand-organ,” he said, “ you repeat your tunes. You have harped on that for a long time. Can’t you believe in my disinterested affection for you? ”

I shook my head smiling.

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“ I am not a credulous person,” I said; “ you have a motive.”

He laughed and looked at me, a cigarette between his fingers.

“ You’re right, Jack, I have,” he said. “ I’m in it, too. I was here that day — February sixth — and rang this very door bell and yet no one has brought it out.”

“ You were here? ” I repeated, in perplexity, “ and saw Lloyd? ”

He shook his head. “ No,” he replied, “ acquit me of that suspicion. He was out and so was Cartouche; Marie interviewed me.”

I sat thinking; it was a blow to me — this admission; what did it mean?

“ Why did you speak of him as you did the next morning and refuse to see him? ” I demanded gravely.

“ I’ll make a clean breast of it,” he said. “ I came here to borrow money.”

“ But I thought —— ”

“ You thought that I was rich? Well, I’m not,” he shrugged his shoulders. “ I’ve run through a lot — and will probably run through a lot more. I wanted five thousand — wanted it badly to save

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some investments at home. I've been dickering in stocks, and I went to see Lloyd. I didn't see him; I even thought that he avoided me on the street. I believe now he didn't know me. I said nothing of my visit because I didn't care to go into explanations. But, my dear boy, Delcasse knows it, I think; the man's a fox, and I'm up to be suspected because I haven't spoken. You see my motive now? "

" I see," I replied slowly, ill at ease; the thing was so unpleasant; " you were working to clear yourself. We're all in it, it seems."

He did not reply and a constraint fell upon us, happily broken by Portman's ring. Lavour jumped up cheerfully.

" This is my first caller," he said; " I've sent for another, but of that you'll know later."

I rose and stood by the mantel-piece waiting while he went down stairs, for he had never been able to get a servant to stay after nightfall. The situation was so strangely mixed that I felt more than ever at sea. Where would the thing end? A mysterious death, that might well have been natural, with no evidence but a few

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grains of poison — which might, after all, have been self-administered — and yet, one after another, we were all coming under the baleful charge; it was like the touch of some evil magic.

For the second time, I heard the two coming up stairs together and I was strangely perturbed. I think if Dr. Lloyd had appeared in his chair by the table it would have caused me no surprise. Portman came in with a grim face; there was no triumph in his manner but a certain grim determination that defied us. I did not offer to shake hands with him and he took a chair without comment. He was a stout, big-shouldered man with short legs and he looked much larger seated than when standing. He leaned forward with his hands on his knees as usual and looked from one to the other.

“ Well,” he said, after a moment, “ I’ve come to make a statement that’ll be of more value to you than you s’pose, and I wouldn’t make it if I didn’t trust you;” he stopped and then addressed himself almost solely to me. “ I’ve watched you conduct the suit,” he said, “ and I believe you’re

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on the square. At least, I'm going to trust you."

I smiled involuntarily. "I suppose I ought to thank you," I said dryly, "for the implied compliment."

"Just so," he retorted, and laughed a little, in a grim, unmirthful fashion; "I've known of this matter for years and I reckon Hen Lloyd would have given something pretty to have known it, but I never told him. Bless your life, it kinder tickled me to think I had him — that he was making a darned fool of himself over a nephew that didn't exist."

"Who didn't exist?" repeated Lavour.

"Who didn't exist!" cried Hez, hurling it at us like a stone from a sling; "Lloyd didn't have any kin but Sereny who married the English lord and the little girl, Anice Holland."

Lavour and I exchanged glances; we began to doubt his sanity and he saw it.

"You darned pesky fools, you," he said, with a hoarse laugh, "don't you know the history of Andrew Schenck? His birth and his mother's death?"

I heard Lavour draw his breath quickly.

"I know that Andrew Schenck, senior,

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was killed in a railroad accident a month before the son was born," I said, " and that Mrs. Schenck only survived the birth of the child about a week or ten days. The facts are simple enough. Dr. Lloyd always felt a peculiar interest in the boy on that account, and because Mrs. Schenck was really his favorite sister."

" Precisely," said Hez, with a wise wag of his head; " perhaps your memory'll go further and recall that the baby was put out to nurse."

" Yes, I think I do recollect that also," I admitted deliberately, strongly suspecting that Hez was trying to play a very worn out trump card.

" Just so," he said, with a chuckle; " well, that child died — died, I tell you, and the nurse substituted her own, a boy a few weeks older."

He stopped to mark the effect of this, but neither Lavaur nor I were especially impressed. It seemed flimsy enough and hard to prove.

" I suppose that you have this on hearsay evidence," I remarked carelessly, " or from kitchen gossip."

He broke out with a homely oath. " Do

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you think I'm a cussed fool?" he asked angrily.

"There would have to be absolute proof," I replied; "you know how hard Schenck would fight."

"I've got proof — sworn evidence," he retorted, "and Schenck suspects it. I've felt my way with him and I've seen his fright; he knows enough to cow him. Laudy, haven't I been saving this up and lying low to get him as soon as ever he came in to the property! It was to have been my handle to his organ. And now I offer it to you. Oh, you've got him — got him tight. Pshaw, he never favored the Lloyds any more'n he favored a fence-rail. I used to look at him walking, along with his uncle, and wonder how that eternal old fool could be so blind. He's the living image of his own father — who used to drive my mule team! Gad, how I've laughed at Hen Lloyd!"

"Then you know who he is?" Lavaur demanded, with keen interest.

"Know who he is?" the old man slapped his knee; "by the Lord Harry! Don't you think I'd know old Jim Buyse's boy?"

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Then the light broke in on me and I saw many things in new shapes.

“ Mr. Portman,” I cried, “ can you prove this beyond a doubt? ”

“ Prove it? ” he said, scornfully, “ prove it! Of course, I can. Don’t I know it inside out, and haven’t I a witness to the Schenck baby’s death? ”

I leaned back in my chair with a deep sigh of relief — almost of joy.

“ If that is the case,” I said, “ it’s well worth your price? I believe Dr. Lloyd would have paid it for the truth.”

The strange old man gave me a look in which his fierce enmity seemed kindled anew.

“ I’d have seen him —— ” he stopped, gritting his teeth; “ do you think I didn’t laugh at him — for coddling old mule-driving Jim’s cub, and that sleek old devil Widow Buyse’s? I calculate that she let enough out of his pockets to even up things. The pair of ’em — she and her boy — had set on to pick him and I was glad enough to let ’em do it.”

“ Are you prepared to confront Mrs. Buyse? ” I asked; “ to force her to confess — that’s the main point? ”

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“Bring her along,” said Hez scornfully, “I guess I can fix her in no time. Do you s’pose that I’d make such an accusation without proofs?”

Lavour began to laugh softly. “Do you know that she’s due here now?” he said; “I wrote to Lady Serena to trump up an errand to send her here to confront Delcasse. There goes the bell now.”

Old Portman stared at him. “Well, I’m darned!” he said, “you manage things like a play actor. Bring her along though — I’m ready.”

Lavour almost ran down stairs and we sat listening. We heard him open the outer door and then there was a sharp discussion and no woman’s voice but those of men.

“Failed to fire,” remarked Hez, winking at me. “I calculate that the Widow Buyse is shy.”

But there was something in the talk below that kept my attention. Then there were steps on the stairs and Lavour came to the door with a singular expression on his face. His eyes sought mine and signalled something — what I could not divine. At the same moment a *commissaire*

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de police and a *gendarme*, both in full uniform, appeared behind him. I had seen the *commissaire* at the time of Lloyd's death and I nodded. He advanced toward me drawing a paper from his pocket. In an instant, I knew all and rose to my feet.

"M. Jean Brinton," he said formally, "I have here a warrant for your arrest; you are charged with the murder of M. Henri Lloyd, in this house, on the sixth day of February, 1902."

"I deny that accusation," I said calmly. "I am innocent."

And at that moment the bell rang sharply again.

CHAPTER XXII

PORTMAN'S WITNESS

The *commissaire* and his assistants stood together in the doorway, doubtless supposing that they blocked the only way of escape and sublimely unconscious that by touching a spring I could pass through the wall into a secret passage, and for one wild moment I think I was tempted to do it, if only to see their surprise. However, I had enough self-control to resist even this temptation, and a stronger one to throw some of them down the stairs. Hez Portman sat by the table staring blankly at me, with comical dismay on his face, which would have amused me at another time. Though I had anticipated that Cartouche would cause my arrest, the warrant came as a shock and, for a moment, I said nothing and Lavaur, after a few words with the *commissaire*, went down stairs and returned with Mrs. Buyse. As usual the woman wore a dark dress and black jacket and a black veil which she had par-

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tially lifted, revealing her sallow and expressionless face and she carried a note from Lady Serena in her hand. When she came in and saw the rather remarkable gathering, she showed some little surprise but maintained her rigidly proper manner, looking from Hez Portman to the *commissaire*, and from the *commissaire* to me.

Lavour entering the room behind her closed the door.

“ Will you wait a few minutes, *M. le Commissaire?*” he said, “ and then we will go with you and your prisoner to your office on the rue d’Anjou. M. Delcasse is due here in ten minutes at latest. Moreover, I wish you to hear what this gentleman will say to Mrs. Leah Buyse.”

The *commissaire* sat down stiffly, glaring aside at me as if he wondered at my indifference, though I was really far from indifferent, for my thoughts had flown to Anice and the mortification was keen. However, I could not resist the warrant in any sensational way and I was wondering if I should be admitted to bail. I was strongly interested, too, in Lavour; after his statement to me, I almost expected that he would be in trouble soon, but there was no hint of it.

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He seemed to care far more for Hez Portman's statement than he did for my situation.

"Mr. Portman," he said, "will you state again in the presence of these witnesses, and the *commissaire*, your recent charges?"

"I s'pose so," replied Hez, with great deliberation, "does that gentleman — with the spike moustache — speak the Yankee tongue? I can't speak gibberish; I've only gathered that our friend here has been arrested by a sort of dumb show. What is he taken up for?"

But no one answered this. "I will translate," said Lavour, "besides *M. le Commissaire* understands some English."

"All right, I've no objection then;" and the old man turned and gave Mrs. Buyse a quizzical look out of his fierce eyes. "Hello, Leah," he said, "I've been telling on you. You're looking a bit old, too, since Jim's death. I've told them all about Andy, you know."

The woman's face stiffened, but she had rare self-control and her features were naturally immobile.

"I'm not understanding you, sir," she

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said, in a civil tone. "It's true that I've had hard times since poor James died; a lone woman like me is like to have — these days."

Mr. Portman laughed. "You don't say?" he remarked, "and with a son in such a soft berth, too?"

We were all watching her — and it must have been an ordeal for her — but we could make nothing of her; doubtless, Portman's previous charge had prepared her.

"You have made some mistake, sir," she said quietly respectful; "I never had but one son and he died when he was only a few weeks old."

"Oh, no, my dear woman," retorted Portman, with sudden fierceness, "don't tell me that! It was the Baby Schenck who died and you substituted your own child, and he has passed ever since as Andrew Schenck."

She looked at him steadily, without a moment's dismay, then she turned to me.

"This old gentleman is quite crazy, Mr. Brinton," she said mildly. "I know he's been thought so, time and again, on account of the hundredth acre — and he's just broken out."

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Hez Portman leaned back in his chair and began to laugh.

“Crazy, eh?” he ejaculated; “you’re a mighty good play actor, Leah Buyse, but you can’t fool me. I can pin you down to it; don’t I know the facts? I paid for ’em — let me tell you, I paid for ’em. Hen Lloyd was a derved fool and I let it go at that and laughed in my sleeve, many a time, but all the while, woman, I had the facts. I accuse you of falsely substituting your own child for a dead one, who was heir to a considerable property from his mother and the probable heir to two millions of his uncle’s. And I’ve got my proofs, written and sworn to, at that. I don’t know what they do here, but at home we’d have you indicted on the charge of conspiracy to defraud the estate—you and your precious boy. By the way, Leah, he’s the living image of his dad.”

I think she was nearer losing control of herself then than at any other time of her life, for she lost her temper and glared at him like an enraged cat cornered by a dog and at bay.

“There isn’t a word of truth in it,” she said, “not a word. It’s just because you

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want to rob poor Mr. Andy between you; you're a set of thieves!" Then she remembered herself and began to whine. "I don't see how you can say such things of a poor lone woman like me! A poor woman working hard for her living!"

Old Portman's shoulders shook with laughter.

"That's the tone, my good woman," he said, "that's the tone; you've used it to beg for the last thirty years or so; keep it up, it may help you; for, by the Lord Harry, I can prove who Andy Schenck is — and you remember that!"

"It's mighty easy for you to say so," she replied, passionately in earnest now; "but you can't prove it, for you weren't present at his birth — and I don't know how you could tell if there had been such a ridiculous thing done."

"No, I was not there," retorted Portman chuckling, "but I've got a witness who was there — a pair of 'em, in fact, and the undertaker who buried the little Schenck baby happens to be my cousin."

Then a change came; she turned the color of ashes, but she kept her nerve.

"It's well enough to say, sir," she cried,

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“ but I guess you can't prove it and I'm not scared.”

“ Oh, no, you're game,” he said, with evident relish for the situation; “ you're a play actor, Leah, first rate, and it's a pity that a term in the penitentiary may sort of keep you off the stage.”

“ You're very cruel to a lone widow,” she whined, “ but you always were a hard man, Hez Portman; I've heard Jim say that you were as hard as nails.”

“ Eh? ” he ejaculated chuckling, “ well, it's worth while to know what your mule team driver thinks of you! ”

“ And a sight of other folks,” said the woman spitefully, “ and if that's all, I reckon I can go back to Lady Bentinck now.”

“ Not yet, my good woman,” replied Lavaur smiling, “ we have need of you.”

“ I can't stay,” she said sharply, looking for the first time thoroughly frightened; “ I promised to go back; Lady Bentinck wants me at once.”

Lavaur smiled yet more broadly.

“ There's a gendarme on the landing of the stairs, Mrs. Buyse,” he said mildly,

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“ and you will find it difficult to get out past him.”

“ Oh, very well, sir,” she said bitterly; “ but I call this a shame, a crying shame, leading a poor, innocent woman into a trap — and in a strange country, too! ”

As she spoke she backed away from the *commissaire* and in doing so came nearer to the secret passage.

Lavour turned around. “ Oh, by the way,” he said, in French, addressing the *commissaire*, “ I want you to see this passage and staircase now that you are determined to arrest my friend,” and he touched a spring.

As a piece of the wall slipped noiselessly back, old Hez Portman jerked his chair around.

“ Well, I’m derved,” he said.

Mrs. Buyse started, too, and drew back sharply; only the *commissaire* seemed genuinely pleased, and he listened with interest to Lavour’s explanation and looked at the plans. Lavour explained the direction of the tunnel and the lodgings of Henry Persifal; as he did this he turned to Mrs. Buyse.

“ The man called Henry Persifal has

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been arrested by this time," he said, "and you are wanted here to identify him."

She clasped her hands tightly and looked down.

"I do not know such a person," she said, with dry lips.

"No," retorted Lavaur, with a short laugh, "I do not think you do, but you will be able, perhaps, to identify the prisoner."

"You're all hard on me, sir," she said discreetly; "and it's all along of that hard old man and his story — and it isn't true — it isn't true!"

Hez Portman chuckled softly. "Oh, ain't it?" he said. "I've got a pocket full of affidavits, Leah," and he drew some papers out and snapped them on his fingers.

She tightened her lips and drew back as if she resisted an impulse to snatch them, but she said nothing.

Meanwhile, the *commissaire* had pocketed the plans of the tunnel and now looked at his watch.

"We can't wait any longer, m'sieur," he said to Lavaur.

I rose. "What's the use, Lavaur?" I

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said. "I'm quite ready to see this thing through. Poor old Cartouche, I can't blame him; he wants to save his skin."

Lavour held up his hand. "Wait a bit," he said, with a queer smile.

At this moment there was a commotion below and the sound of a woman's voice — highly insistent — then the frou-frou of skirts on the stairs and Lady Serena walked in followed by Lord Bentinck. Even Lavour looked amazed. She held out her hand to her host with a charming smile.

"Oh, I know you didn't invite me," she said, "but I had to come; I felt that something was going on. What is it all about?"

Lord Bentinck — who had caught sight of police uniforms — was frowning heavily.

"Oh, I say, Lady Bentinck," he protested, "we're going home at once."

But Lady Serena was not to be balked.

"John, has Mr. Portman told you anything important?" she cried.

"To be sure I have, madam," said Hez calmly; "I told them the facts. Andy Schenck is an impostor; he's the son of that woman, Leah Buyse, and her husband,

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old Jim, who used to drive my mule team to the saw-mills."

Lady Serena sat down in the nearest chair and looked at him with round blue eyes.

"My dear Mr. Portman," she said, "that's the very nicest thing I have ever heard. I've always been ashamed of him! Can it be true?"

The old man eyed her with interest; her pretty face, her furbelows and ruffles, her blue toque and the violets at her throat. Slowly a smile broke over his face.

"Well," he said, "I'm derved if I ain't glad I did it!"

Mrs. Buyse fixed sullen eyes on Lady Serena.

"There ain't a word of truth in it," she said, with white lips.

Her mistress turned coldly and gave her a haughty glance.

"I did not address you, Buyse," she remarked, with the air of a *grande dame*.

Lord Bentinck would not sit down. "Really," he protested, "really, you know, Serena, this is very unusual."

"Oh, do hush, Tommy," she said, irrepressible as ever; "I can't sit still and

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wait. I must know all about it. Who has been arrested? ”

“ I have,” I replied grimly; “ charged with the murder of Dr. Lloyd.”

“ What nonsense,” she remarked, giving the *commissaire* an indignant look; “ how perfectly stupid! ”

“ Quite so,” I replied, “ but it’s a fact.”

“ You’re going to send word to the American Embassy, of course? ” suggested Lord Bentinck.

“ The very thing! ” said his wife; “ why I’ve known Mr. Brinton all my life,” she protested to the *commissaire*; “ I never heard of anything so foolish — never! ”

The Frenchman bowed. “ I have the warrant, madame,” he remarked, “ and I have already permitted this gentleman to remain here half an hour —— ”

Lavaur interrupted him by jumping up and opening a window; he had heard a carriage.

“ Oh, it’s all right, *M. le Commissaire*,” he said; “ I think we had all better go to the Rue d’Anjou now to meet the other prisoner, Henry Persifal.”

Mrs. Buyse rose. “ I believe I can go, sir? ” she said grimly, addressing Lavaur.

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Without answering her, he turned to the *commissaire* and commenced to speak to him rapidly in French, but too low for us to understand much of what passed. Meanwhile, I was listening to the sounds in the room below. I was sure that I recognized Delcasse's voice. He had come, then, and evidently with news.

Mrs. Buyse moved toward the door, but as she reached it, the *commissaire* made a signal to one of his men and the *gendarme* laid his hand on her shoulder.

"You are detained as a witness, Mrs. Buyse," said Lavaur.

She gave him a look of such intense dislike that it transformed her whole face and brought it to life.

"Oh, very well," she said.

Then the door opened and M. Delcasse entered, followed by a short woman with reddish hair and a round, freckled face. In a moment I recognized her as the same whom I had seen on the Strand descending from the omnibus. Old Portman looked up and nodded.

"Well, Mattie, so you got taken up?" he said. "But it's all right — you may tell."

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But she was looking past him straight at Mrs. Buyse, and she turned white to the lips under that matron's gaze.

"Didn't she substitute her own baby for Mrs. Schenck's, Mattie?" prompted Portman.

Mattie laid hold of the back of a chair; her lips shook.

"She did that, sir," she admitted. "I knew it, and old Mrs. Rice knew it up to home. She's paid us to keep quiet, and — somehow — at first it didn't seem to matter much and we felt kinder sorry for the baby, so we kept close — and then she paid us."

"You're a liar!" cried Mrs. Buyse.

"Goodness gracious!" cried Lady Serena, looking around at us all; "who is this person?"

It was M. Delcasse who answered her with great politeness.

"It is the woman who bought the poison, madame," he said, with a bow.

"Oh!" gasped Lady Serena; "what next?"

Lavour turned to the *commissaire*. "Monsieur," he said, "we are ready to

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accompany you now to the rue d'Anjou to meet your other prisoner."

Lord Bentinck touched his wife's shoulder. "Come," he said.

But she looked up bravely.

"Oh, no, no!" she protested; "we are going, too, Bentinck," and she half pushed and half coaxed him along to the cab which followed us to the rue d'Anjou.

CHAPTER XXIII

MOTHER AND SON

In Paris a little red glass lantern hung at the door announces the residence of a *commissaire de police* in each arrondissement of the city. It is the police station of the precinct, to use a homely term, and to one of these we all went on that night. The room, with its desk for the *commissaire*, and its official stenographer, and its telephone, was neither large nor well-lighted and was a curious background for our strangely assorted party. Mrs. Buyse, Mattie and I found ourselves ranged on one side with the gendarmes, while Lady Serena and Lord Bentinck, Hez Portman and Lavaur sat opposite. The *commissaire* took his place at the desk and M. Delcasse presented his report on the mysterious murder of Dr. Henry Lloyd.

Lady Serena looked up in surprise and caught my eye; she had evidently been absorbed in the thought of Andrew Schenck and the murder had dropped below her

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horizon. But before M. Delcasse began to read his report, there was a little stir and the police brought in two other prisoners, Andrew Schenck and Mlle. Luce Sapeurs, the little shopkeeper of the rue de la Chaussée d'Antin.

Schenck sat down between two gendarmes and, folding his arms, stared sullenly at the floor, refusing to look at us.

After explaining his connection with the case, M. Delcasse proceeded to read his report. He described very briefly the details of the murder and the discovery of the secret staircase after the arrest of the concierge. Then he explained that his first effort had been directed toward tracing the mysterious lodger of No. 24 rue Taitbout. This had been rather difficult at first.

"I found that Henri Persifal was a friend of either Mrs. Buyse or Mlle. Sapeurs, and that he had left Paris on the morning of February 7th, and gone to Havre. There I lost him; he dropped completely out of sight. He was altogether the most probable suspect of the Lloyd murder; it was therefore my duty to find him at any cost, and this I did by his letters. H. Persifal could not be found, but

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letters addressed to H. Persifal, No. 24 rue Taitbout, were posted and were delivered at the house. Where did they go? To the public post-office and were there delivered to a man claiming to be H. Persifal. That man was Mr. Andrew Schenck. Having myself decoyed him with a letter to H. Persifal, I had my proof. Then I found that Mlle. Sapeurs had once been a servant in the house on the rue Fontaine St. Georges and that she knew the secret of the staircase; she had confided it to Mrs. Leah Buyse, the foster mother of Andrew Schenck. Schenck, under the assumed name of H. Persifal, hired those rooms at No. 24 rue Taitbout on January 10th and gave them up February 8th. He was in the habit of visiting the cellar where he had stored various trunks and boxes. He bought lubricating oil for the locks and hinges on January 20th. He left Paris, February 7th, at 6 a. m., went over to England, where he immediately spread the report at the hotel that he had just come by steamer from New York.

“ On the night of February 6th, at seven o'clock, Mrs. Buyse came to see him at his rooms at No. 24 rue Taitbout. She was

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with him when Mme. Enfin went out to the theatre. When Mme. Enfin returned at half after eleven she met Mr. Persifal coming from the cellar. He excused his presence there at that hour on the ground that he had been packing. He then notified her that he should leave in the morning and paid her bill. She does not know what time Mrs. Buyse left the house, but the night watchman on that street says that a veiled woman left that house at a quarter after twelve, after the lights were out in all the rooms visible from the sidewalk. He followed her and traced her to the shop of Mlle. Sapeurs on the rue de la Chaussée d'Antin. When the supposed Henry Persifal left the next day he threw away an old pair of shoes. I have them to offer in evidence; they are marked with the mould and clay from the floor of the tunnel between the house on the rue Taitbout and the house on the rue Fontaine St. Georges.

“ On February 2d, Mrs. Mattie Jacobs, formerly a chambermaid for Mrs. Schenck, the mother of Mr. Andrew Schenck, and in the pay of Mrs. Buyse, bought the poison in London and sent it to Mrs. Buyse in Paris without knowing for what purpose it

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was to be used. It arrived here by mail on February 4th, and was opened in Persifal's rooms on the rue Taitbout; the upper right hand corner of the envelope being found under the bureau in that room. Neither Mr. Schenck nor Mrs. Buysse can be proved to have had any communications — of an incriminating nature — with the concierge, Jacques Cartouche, or with Mr. John Brinton, or M. Gillette Lavaur, all of whom have been under suspicion.

“ I caused the arrest of Mr. Andrew Schenck this afternoon about four o'clock.”

As the detective ceased reading there was a dead silence. Then Andrew Schenck — as we had called him so long — rose. His face was deadly white, but his eyes were inflamed with liquor. He had undoubtedly been drinking.

“ I wish to make a statement,” he said, and his lips shook.

Old Hez Portman leaned forward, clasping his hands on the top of his heavy walking stick.

“ Courage, Andy,” he said mockingly; “ face it out like a man. We all know you now.”

Schenck did not look at him.

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“ All that has been said is true,” he said, in a strange voice, “ except one point; the inference that I killed Dr. Lloyd. I never thought of killing him. I knew that he had made a will cutting me off, and that a forged will — forged by an evil-minded person — who has stood at my elbow like the devil prompting me to all my wrongdoing — was to be substituted for the true will, and was so substituted almost at the time it was made — that was in December, 1902 — the whole thing being contrived and carried out by the same person; I was never so adroit! Dr. Lloyd was always closely watched and when he withdrew the will — the forgery — from the bank and took it to his rooms, we planned to get it — before he found out the forgery — or to get the will he intended to make — if it discriminated against me. I never went further than that, I never went further than the cellar of his house to wait for — that woman! It was she who put the poison in his wine; she told me it was a sleeping potion; she tricked and fooled me and then I could not betray her, without betraying my own part in the — the effort to get a will in my favor. She murdered my un-

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cle and I accuse her of it!" and he pointed a finger that shook at Mrs. Buyse.

The woman sat grim and immovable in her chair between the two gendarmes, her colorless face unchanged except for the eyes — they were fastened on Andrew with a singular expression — all of her that was alive seemed to be concentrated there; they gleamed with a terrible intensity of emotion.

"Andy," she said, in a low, strained voice, "you have murdered me and — I am your mother!"

He uttered a furious exclamation. "I don't believe you!" he cried; "you were always teaching me to lie — this is one of your falsehoods. Pshaw, do you think I'd believe any such rot as that?"

"It's gospel truth, Andy," remarked old Hez, with a grin.

"I don't believe it!" shouted Schenck.

"You know it's true," said Mrs. Buyse, slowly and bitterly; "I've done too much for you; you're as selfish as ever — you save yourself at my expense! Well, well, such is my reward. It's true that you did not murder Dr. Lloyd; I bear witness to that for the sake of the love that has made

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me lie for you, and steal for you — and, at last, kill for you. But you — you are murdering your own mother! ”

Her hand had been fumbling at the bosom of her dress; she lifted a paper swiftly to her lips and then she turned to Hez Portman.

“ You’ve got your hundredth acre, old man, and much good may it do you! ” she cried, and shivered a little as if she felt suddenly cold. “ Good-by, ” she said, holding out both shaking hands toward Andrew; “ good-by, my son. I kept enough of Dr. Lloyd’s draught to help me out of all trouble — I’m gone, too! ” and her head fell forward.

The woman was sinking into a stupor, the effect of some drug that she had swallowed, and her son stood up and cursed her, calling her a liar, a thief, a murderess, until a gendarme put his hand over his mouth.

Lavaur took a little bit of dark brown woolen cloth from his pocket and, bending down, fitted it in the edge of Mrs. Buyse’s flounce.

“ It is the very skirt she wore on the sixth of February, ” he remarked; “ I

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found this on the floor in Dr. Lloyd's study the day after his death."

Meanwhile, a gendarme had gone at a run for a physician, but it was easy to see that it was too late.

Lady Serena had hidden her face on Bentinck's arm and was crying softly.

The *commissaire* turned to me and bowed.

"Monsieur, I beg your pardon," he said; "you are, of course, discharged."

* * * * *

It was many months afterwards that I walked across the lawn at Broad Acres, Dr. Lloyd's old place near Boston. It was midsummer and the slopes were green. Behind lay a strip of pine woods, before us the land dropped suddenly and gave a wide glimpse of the sea. The sun glinted on white sails that moved slowly like wings against the distance. The air was fragrant and the whole scene was radiantly full of summer time.

Anice Holland stood beside me looking down at a spot some hundred yards or more away where the surveyors were at work.

"Old Hez has his hundredth acre at

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last," she said, smiling; "after waiting so long, too."

"Better late with him than never," I replied; "and how long must I wait for my answer, Anice? You have grown kinder to Neighbor Portman than to me."

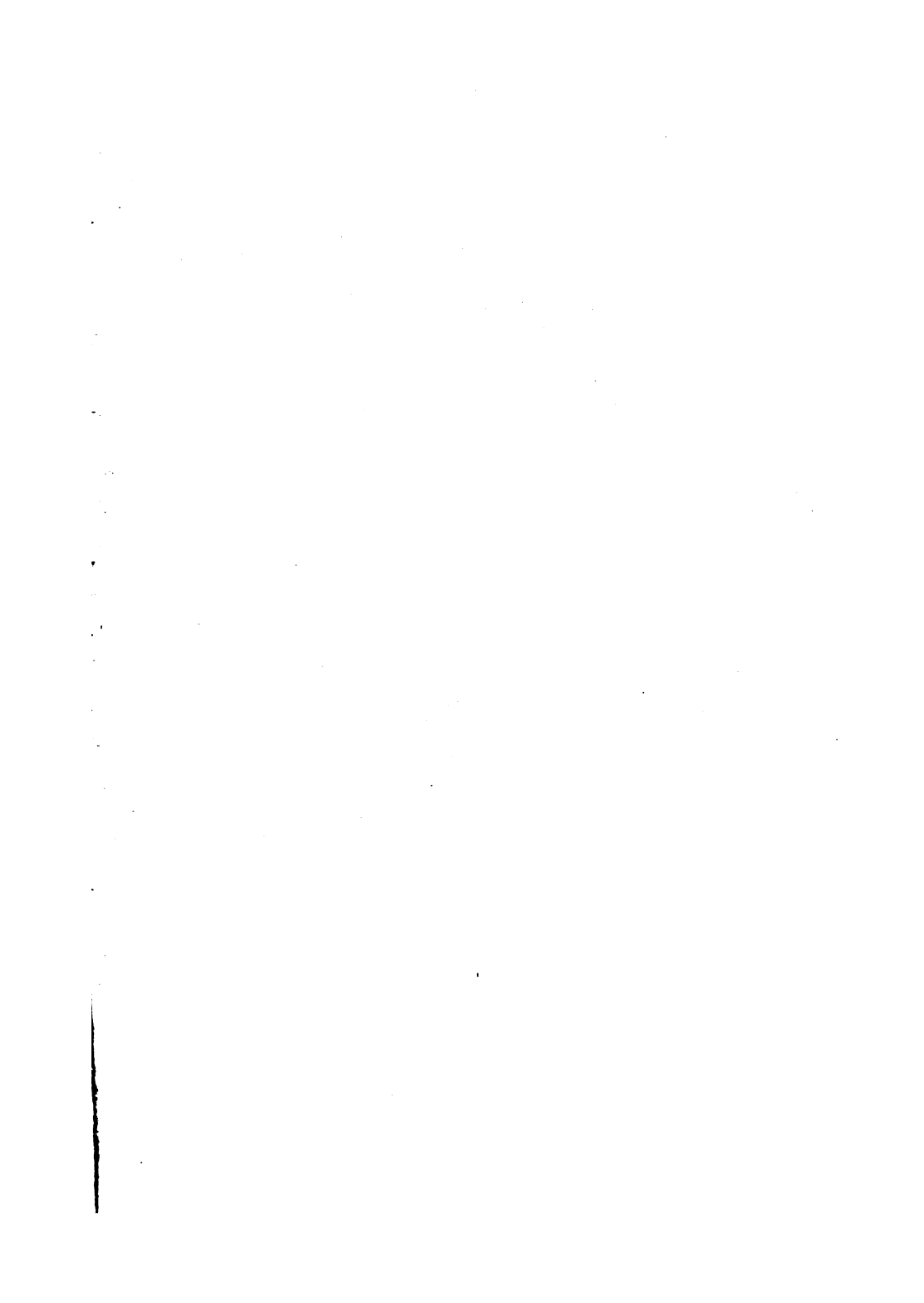
"Your answer?" she repeated, averting her face and walking ahead of me up the long slopes of sunshine.

"My answer," I replied. "I have been waiting for long weary months, Anice, in fact, I think, for years — doing penance for premature speech! But there is a limit to all human endurance; I can't wait any longer. There is an end to everything, you know, but love."

She turned and looked away at the little white sails on the summer sea; the sunshine whitened her white dress, it glorified her face. She stood with her hands lightly clasped before her, her whole attitude demure.

Then she gave me a swift, inscrutable glance.

"Your answer?" she said softly, with a little laugh; "don't you know what your answer is?" and she held out both her hands.





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